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**RETRAINING ADULTS:
AN EXAMINATION OF NATIONAL TRAINING POLICY,
ITS INFLUENCE ON THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF
ADULT JOB RETRAINING IN FURTHER EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY,
AND CONSEQUENT IMPACT ON THE EXPERIENCES AND
PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATING ADULTS**

VOLUME 1 OF 2

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

BY

PAULINE ADELE FOSTER

JANUARY 1990

To Mam and Dad

S U M M A R Y

This is a study of adult job retraining in further education and industry. Through in-depth case studies of a small number of chemical and engineering companies and one college of further education, it attempts to develop an understanding of the broader relationship between further education, industry and government as it pertains to retraining. Data was collected by unstructured interview and participant observation. Supporting data was collected by means of postal questionnaires.

The thesis is divided into four parts. Part one examines national government training and retraining policy; a policy characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence. Part two reviews the development of further education, and assesses the adult job retraining provision within one particular college. Part three examines retraining in industry and describes the enterprise restructuring under which retraining took place in three chemical companies. On the basis of findings outlined in Parts two and three, Part four asks whether further education is equipped to provide the type of retraining which industry believes it requires. The thesis concludes that, because industry and further education acknowledge two different concepts of retraining, a structural disengagement occurs. Further education seeks to provide individuals with general competencies whereas industry is concerned with enterprise specific retraining. The remainder of Part four examines the retraining experience from the point of view of trainees and students and looks at the way skills, in the context of training and retraining, undergo reconstruction.

This thesis contributes to an area which is currently under-researched; and at a time of structural change within industry and further education, issues relating to retraining become important. The thesis examines this restructuring and suggests ways in which retraining can be reorganised for the benefit of industry, communities and individuals.

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C H A P T E R 1

I N T R O D U C T I O N

T H E S I S

This research is about adult job retraining, about the retraining of adults for employment which takes place in industry and colleges of further education. It examines the relationship between industry and further education and asks whether further education colleges can provide the training input which industry demands.

The overall aim has been to develop an understanding of the broader picture of adult job retraining in Britain through an in depth study of a small number of chemical and engineering companies and a case study of one college of further education.¹ The practical implications of conducting a research project such as this meant that all cases and all situations could not be examined in enough depth to elicit sufficiently meaningful data. Therefore specific instances have been selected which cast light on general processes and on the relationship between further education, industry and government as it pertains to adult job retraining.

Each of the industrial organisations discussed in the remainder of the thesis were, to a greater or lesser degree, undergoing enterprise restructuring. As a result, particular elements of their organisational structures were more visible and more accessible to research. Each of the industrial organisations was chosen because they had recently introduced, or were planning to introduce, a retraining programme for their shop floor employees. These plans for retraining the workforce were an integral part of changes in the reorganisation of work including multi-skilling, changes in trade union representation and the introduction of new conditions of service for blue collar workers.

The first part of the thesis examines national training and retraining policy for adults and subsequent parts look at the way that policy is interpreted by colleges of further education and industry. Chapter 2 describes a national adult training and retraining structure which is fragmented and loose. Indeed, it was not until the early 1970s and the development of the Training Opportunities Programme and the Skill Centres that there was any real attempt at provision for adults. The history of state involvement in training and retraining for employment is characterised by ambivalence and ambiguity. The ambivalence is reflected in a historical reticence on the part of industry and some politicians towards state intervention in industrial retraining. Ambiguity refers to the irresolvable tension which exists between interventionism and voluntarism in British manpower policy. That tension is paralleled in the way further education colleges interpret national training policy and in industry's support for training and retraining.

Further education colleges are one of the many types of providers upon which employers as consumers of training, can draw. However, the colleges have not, in the past, seen themselves as part of this market. This has much to do with their historic development and the way in which the sector is structured. Further education is

organised to provide education and training under a specific remit. As far as training courses are concerned this means general competency based skills. It also means that the training will be structured into courses and college terms. There is considerable debate presently regarding the structure of provision of training courses within further education, and the structure of the college year is a significant element in the mismatch between the requirements of industry and the type of training colleges can offer.

More important from the point of view of this research, is the structural dislocation between industry and the colleges, located in terms of the general competency based training which further education traditionally provides. This is demonstrated in the way staff define their jobs and how they relate to students. It is also reflected in the fact that students are taken out of employment to receive training. Colleges are concerned with training for industry as a whole and this contrasts sharply with the enterprise specific training which industry appears to require.

As Chapter 9 demonstrates, as industry restructures, so the concept of skill is continually being reconstructed. Unfortunately colleges operate at some distance from industry with stable views of what skill is about. The point is made that it would be incorrect and unfair to accuse the colleges of complacency. The fact that colleges have so far responded in a limited manner has much to do with their historical development in response to central government policy, the range and type of provision which has developed, and the nature and their reliance on a particular source of funding.

Retraining is viewed from different perspectives by both industry and further education. As far as employers are concerned, retraining is about increasing efficiency and maximising profit levels. It is also about developing a more co-operative attitude and greater commitment amongst employees. From the other side the colleges must work

within the constraints imposed upon them through central and local government in a way which enables them to respond appropriately to the perceived requirements of industry. They must also respond to demographic changes which have resulted in a contraction in certain traditional areas of provision. It is more than simply a question of choosing a direction in which to develop. It is also about ensuring that direction is the most appropriate for further education and also satisfies the needs of the individual trainees as well as the employer. It is an issue of some debate whether the type of training which industry appears to require is in the best interests of the trainee.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This is not intended to be an elaborate and detailed review of the literature which informed this research. In writing this section the aim has been to illustrate the way in which the subject matter of the research draws on different bodies of literature. There will be more detailed comment on the literature in subsequent parts of this chapter and the main body of the thesis.

THE PROBLEM

As stated earlier the aim of this research was to build up a broad picture of adult job retraining in Britain by looking in detail at several industrial concerns and a college of further education. Information was sought under a variety of headings and these included past and present national government policy as it relates to adult job retraining

and to further education. Some outline of the existing provision for training within industry and education was required, as well as information regarding the history and structure of further education. The idea of change is central to this thesis and this was explored through literature on industrial change and the world of work, with particular reference to flexibility and the nature of skill and deskilling. Finally the thesis draws on some literature around the theme of status and class in an attempt to give meaning to individuals' perceptions of the retraining experience.

THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The problem that became immediately apparent at the commencement of the literature search was that there was virtually no literature available that covered the precise area to be researched. There was, for example, no literature which detailed the problems and experiences of adult students on training courses in colleges of further education, although there was some literature concerning adult students on education courses in higher education. Another problem was that all of the literature concerning policy and legislative change in technical education and training in Britain focused almost totally on young people. This is not surprising given the nature of government policy which has emphasised the need to train young people, under the assumption that an individual will require training only once in their lives.

The initial search led to a wide range of literature from a variety of sources which dealt with diverse subject matter. All of this was only marginally relevant to the research, and very little, if any, provided information which could be used to make direct comparisons with the data which was collected. For this reason the literature review has been made

deliberately brief. In other words, a detailed review of all the literature would have only limited relevance to the thesis. However, an outline review focusing on a limited number of the more relevant pieces of work is more appropriate. In this way it is possible to show how the research straddles a number of important subject areas from industrial change to government policy to the further education system.

In addition to the usual texts, full use was made of conference materials, government papers, publications and newspaper articles. Private contacts allowed access to certain trade union and official training literature which might not otherwise have been readily available, although none of this would be regarded as confidential. In addition the researcher was handed some documents in confidence, and as with information given verbally, the sources have not been quoted to protect anonymity.

The literature can best be summarised under five separate headings, and these are listed below accordingly.

Government Policy and Legislative Change relating to Adult Job Retraining

Much of the material under this heading was essentially descriptive or was clearly designed as publicity for government training programmes, for example "The Next Twenty Years: A New Approach to Adult Training" by Jenny Bacon, which appeared in Training and Development, Vol. 3, Part 1, 1984. (Bacon, 1984) The same comment probably applies to a lengthy article which appeared in the BACIE Journal in January 1982 with contributions from Sir Richard O'Brien, then Chairman of the Manpower Services Commission, Norman Tebbit, then Secretary of State for Employment and Ken Graham former Assistant General Secretary of the TUC. (BACIE Journal, 1982, pp. 17-25)

Also included in this category are government white papers and reports and literature produced by trade unions and other bodies to describe new developments in government training policy. In addition there are documents detailing alternative strategies for training including one produced by the Labour Party in 1986, "Education and Training: Options for Labour", which advocated returning training to the public sphere with stronger links between education and training; another produced by the Labour Party together with the TUC in 1984 entitled "A Plan for Training"; and finally a document produced by the Society of Civil and Public Servants, "Work for the Future: A New Strategy for Training and Employment", which recommends abandoning the Manpower Services Commission and transferring responsibilities to local authorities. (Labour Party, 1986; TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee, 1984; SCPS, 1986)

There exists another a body of literature which investigates and challenges government policy. One of the most useful of these texts is "Challenging the MSC on Jobs, Education and Training" edited by Caroline Benn and John Fairley. (Benn and Fairley, 1986) There is also a series of timely articles and publications which the Unemployment Unit continues to produce which look critically at, for example, the New Job Training Scheme, the Restart Scheme and Employment Training. (Unemployment Unit, June 1987; July 1987; 1988; 1989) The Unemployment Unit also publishes a regular briefing containing similar articles and updated employment statistics. The problem with this literature, as far as the research is concerned, relates to the focus of the texts. For example Benn and Fairley's book focuses on youth training and the Unemployment Unit's focus is youth training and programmes for the unemployed.

For the chapter on national training policy two articles, one by Malcolm Anderson and John Fairley entitled "The Politics of Industrial Training in the United Kingdom" and

another by Joan Stringer and Jeremy Richardson entitled "Policy Stability and Policy Change: Industrial Training 1964-1982," were invaluable. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983; Stringer and Richardson, 1982) Both of these articles offer an in depth analysis of manpower policy in Britain.

Industrial Change

Under this heading is included literature that describes and examines relationships between employer and employee in the workplace, the effect of technological change and the move towards more flexible working practices. The literature describing the employment relationship represents mainly background reading, although work by Michael Burawoy, Colin Gill, Stephen Marglin, Stephen Wood, Graeme Salaman have informed the tenor of the research more than others. (Burawoy, 1979; 1981; 1985; Gill, 1985; Marglin, 1986; Wood, 1982; 1985; Salaman, 1985) Technological change had an impact on all of the workplaces which were visited and was the reason for some of the retraining which took place in companies and in the college of further education. For this reason literature which assessed the affect of technological change was particularly relevant, especially work by Cynthia Cockburn, Roger Penn and Helen Rainbird. Again, however, this literature was peripheral to the main theme of the research. (Cockburn, 1983; 1985(a); 1985(b); Penn, 1987; Rainbird, 1985(a); 1985(b); 1986)

Still within this same category is a group of texts written by individuals other than sociologists, which provide a contrasting perspective. This includes an article by Rajan of the Insitute of Manpower Studies entitled "New Technology and Training: Missed opportunities"; and a report by the same author "Training and Recruitment Effects of Technical Change". (Rajan, 1985; 1987) Both these reports linked training with new technology and looked at why employers do not train.

Another perspective comes from a group of reports which look at the effect of microelectronics and new technology generally on work. There are four reports produced between 1979 and 1986 and two papers given at an international symposium in Japan, the first by Graham Reid, at the time Chief Economic Adviser at the Department of Employment, entitled "The Implications of Microelectronics for Employment Policies in the U.K.", and "Microelectronics, Job Content and Job Requirements" by John Monks who at the time held the position of Head of Organisation and Industrial Relations at the TUC. (Reid, 1985; Monks, 1985) Other reports were prepared by the Transport and General Workers Union, the Electronics Economic Development Council Employment and Technology Task Force, and the Heavy Electrical Machinery Economic Development Council. (TGWU, 1979; NEDO, 1983(a); 1983(b))

Still under this heading of industrial change is a group of literature which looks at flexibility and multi-skilling. Some of the literature, for example that by John Atkinson, takes an optimistic view of the concept of flexibility and of the introduction of more flexible working patterns, seeing it as necessary and beneficial. (Atkinson, 1985). "Towards the Flexible Craftsman", published by the Technical Change Centre in 1985 may also fit into this category. (Cross, 1985) It is a factual account of the impact of multi-skilling and flexibility on the work of engineering craftsmen in the process industries in Britain. It examines the role of the engineering 'craftsman' today and the way that role is changing and will continue to change in the future. Cross has, however, been criticised for conflating existing changes with possible developments.²

The latter work does not offer any analysis of the meaning of multi-skilling from the point of view of the employee, and where questions are raised, these tend to be

technical rather than theoretical. It would appear that this report has been written with the needs of management in mind. Indeed, the vast majority of the interviews, the principal means of data collection, were carried out with managers from fifty-five companies in the United Kingdom. Out of a total number of interviews which must have reached nine hundred, only twenty were individual interviews with 'craftsmen' and a further three were group interviews with 'craftsmen'.

Material published by the Incomes Data Services is similar in that it offers descriptive accounts of current situations and expected future change. This material is, however, much more useful because it covers a wider range of industries and offers a general analysis of trends. Two editions in the series were particularly useful. These were Incomes Data Services Study No. 407, dated April 1988 entitled "Flexible Working", and Study No. 360, dated April 1986, entitled "Flexibility at Work". (Incomes Data Services, 1986; 1988)

In addition to the above, two articles which appeared in the Industrial Relations Review and Report in March and April 1984 were also especially useful in outlining the extent and nature of flexibility agreements in British industry. (Industrial Relations Review and Report, March 1984; April 1984)

Other useful literature under this category included four articles which examined single union and no-strike agreements. These include two reports from the Industrial Relations Review and Report, a discussion paper from the Centre for a Working World and a report by Ian Linn of Northern College on a single union agreement which was signed at a chemical plant on Humberside. (Industrial Relations Review and Report, August 1981; July 1984; Centre for a Working World, 1988; Linn, 1986)

Further Education

Under this heading there were a number of useful historical surveys of technical education including Perry's "The Evolution of British Manpower Policy", Robertson's "Technical Education in the British Shipbuilding Industry 1863-1914" and Stephens and Roderick's "Scientific and Technical Education in Early Industrial Britain". (Perry, 1976; Robertson, 1974; Stephens and Roderick, 1981) These texts provided some background historical data, although the focus was mainly on apprenticeship training and technical education generally, not on colleges of further education. More specific historical material was found in Adrian Bristow's "Inside the College of Further Education" although this text did not take account of more recent changes in further education, it being last published in 1976. (Bristow; 1976)

Bristow probably ranks with three other texts as being the classic studies of further education colleges. These other texts are Beryl Tipton, "Conflict and Change in a Technical College", published in 1973, Cantor and Roberts, "Further Education Today: A Critical Review", which was revised and republished in 1983 and finally Gleason and Mardle "Further Education or Training?" published in 1980. (Tipton, 1973; Cantor and Roberts, 1979; Gleason and Mardle, 1980) Cantor and Roberts offer a very technical and factual account of further education. However, Tipton and Gleason and Mardle get closer to their subject.

The book by Gleason and Mardle was a particularly interesting and thorough investigation of the way in which the further education system works with industry. Because of the nature of the courses for adults at West Biscop College (the college studied), there was a much reduced need for the type of co-operation with local industry as described by Gleason and Mardle. With a few exceptions, co-operation with

industry, where it was necessary, tended to be on a national rather than local scale. Nevertheless, Gleason and Mardle's contribution was interesting because it was more up to date and dealt specifically with training in further education. However, the focus was upon young craft apprentices and not adults.

This thesis is not intended to be the type of exhaustive survey of the further education system presented by Cantor and Roberts, nor is it intended to provide a thorough critique of a particular college in the style of Tipton or Gleason and Mardle. For this reason these texts are only marginally relevant to this research.

From the other material which was available dealing with further education, the Journal of Further and Higher Education and the journal of the further education teachers trade union, the National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) occasionally yielded useful articles. Two publications by the Further Education Unit also stand out. These are: "The Changing Face of FE", which presents views from inside further education, and "The College Does it Better". (Farmer, 1982(a); 1982(b); FEU, 1987) All of these publications served to provide an up to date overview of the problems facing further education.

Adult Job Retraining within Industry

There is a mass of literature detailing the type of training which goes on in industry, much of which can be found in publications such as Personnel Management, Training Officer, and Industrial Society. There is also literature which discusses the reasons why a company should train or retrain, and looks at why some companies do not train. This includes material published by the Institute of Manpower Studies and by the Manpower Services Commission, for example, "A Challenge to Complacency", produced for the

MSC by Coopers and Lybrand Associates, and "Competence and Competition". (IMS, 1984; Coopers and Lybrand, 1985; MSC, 1984)

Skills and Aspirations

Under this final heading are three categories of literature upon which this research draws. The first category covers that which revolves around Braverman and the deskilling debate. The most useful of these texts are Braverman's original text "Labour and Monopoly Capital" and the criticisms provided by the Brighton Labour Process Group, the articles in Stephen Wood's "The Degradation of Work", an article by Tony Elger in *Capital and Class* and another article by David Stark which appeared in *Theory and Society*. (Braverman, 1974; Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977; Wood, 1982; Elger, 1979; Stark, 1980)

"The Nature of Work" by Paul Thompson also provides a through review of literature around the labor process debate. (Thompson, 1983) In addition, this book brings together, in one volume, the various other debates around the subject of work and the nature of work. Again the subject matter is peripheral to the main thrust of this research, but an understanding of the labour process debate and the numerous debates within the sociology of work form the background to the chapter on skills.

Of particular use was a collection of articles and contributions from Penn, in conjunction with others, which examines the nature of skill and offers a useful alternative theory to deskilling, namely enskilling. (Penn, 1982(a); 1983(a); Penn and Scattergood, 1985) Penn together with More and Lee have also looked separately at skill, the apprenticeship system and trade unions and class. (Penn 1983(b); 1985; 1986; More, 1980; 1982; Lee, 1979; 1981; 1982)

The final part of the thesis attempts to link notions of skill with class, status and aspirations. The aim is to discover whether retraining for new occupations altered individuals' perceptions of themselves or their place in the world. Comparative material was found in work by Roberts et al "New Approaches to Economic Life"; Martin Bulmer's "Working Class Images of Society"; Brown and Brannen's two articles in Sociology entitled "Social Relations and Social Perspectives Amongst Shipbuilding Workers - A Preliminary Statement, Parts I and II"; Bechhofer et al and Scase and Goffee's work on the self-employed and Cyril Sofer's "Men in Mid-Career". (Roberts, 1985; Bulmer, 1975; Brown and Brannen, 1970(a); 1970(b); Bechhofer et al, 1974; Bechhofer and Elliott, 1978; Scase and Goffee, 1981; Sofer, 1970) Useful comparisons were also made with Goldthorpe et al's work on the car workers at Luton. (Goldthorpe et al, 1968; 1969).

SOME EXPLANATIONS

Throughout the thesis certain terms have been used frequently which may have a variety of meanings in different contexts. This section is intended to explain in which sense the terms are used in the thesis. Reference will be made to the literature where appropriate and to data collected during the research. The opportunity is also taken to explain why certain issues such as gender and ethnicity have not been considered as central parts of the research. This section begins with an examination of the three concepts around which the thesis is structured: education, training and skills.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING³

Areas of education and training frequently overlap and on occasion the terms are used interchangeably. Generally the word training conjures up the idea of instruction in a practical discipline or in physical skills. Training can, however, refer to learning in areas which are not normally considered totally practical disciplines, for example, art or a profession, and the words instruct and discipline can also be used when talking about education.

In seeking a distinction in the use of both of these words, it might be best to regard education as the process of imparting a society's values and norms whilst allowing for the development of analytical skills and more divergent modes of thought. Training, on the other hand might refer to more tightly structured subject matter which is to be absorbed virtually without question. Training in motor skills, for example, involves repeated and frequent practice so that movements can eventually be performed flawlessly and for the most part without conscious thought. However, such distinctions are problematic since the process of education involves training the mind to follow through with particular ways of thinking, and dealing with ideas and the development of analytical skills are very much a part of training since not all skilled activity is automatic.

The terms training and education are used in this research in accordance with their commonly accepted definitions. This means that the terms are used interchangeably, acknowledging that such distinctions as outlined above are both artificial and restrictive. Instead, this research distinguishes between the way in which knowledge and skills are imparted in further education and in industry.

This thesis attempts to show that FE and industry have taken different trajectories with regard to skills training. Further education colleges have traditionally, and still are, concerned to provide general competency based training rather than enterprise specific skills. Employers are concerned with developing skill competencies but they are possibly much more concerned with changing attitudes. The concern of the colleges is with industry as a whole rather than the enterprise, and they consequently seek to provide students with skills and competencies in preference to specific attitudes designed to bind the employee to the enterprise.

What further education can do is provide skills and competencies and it can also teach the individual the appropriate outlook which will be useful in securing employment and in working in a particular occupation. These are attitudes of mind, but they are attitudes which are useful to the individual, not to the organisation. At the college studied in this research there was some attempt to introduce workplace discipline into the classroom with regard to timekeeping, alcohol consumption and personal appearance, but these attitudes were adopted by the students in a highly conscious and instrumental fashion. They were tools of their trade which would assist them in gaining their ambitions. The students were encouraged to think about these tools, assess their value and use them.

For industry the "right" attitudes seem to be a condition of employment. They may be no more or no less internalised by the employee than the student in an FE college, but the difference is that these attitudes tie the employee to the enterprise and the needs of that enterprise.

TRAINING/RETRAINING

Retraining suggests that the trainee already possesses a skill which would potentially render him or her employable. However, it may be that this skill has become redundant because it has been superseded by another which is more appropriate to the conditions of the job. This could be the result of technical change or the rationalisation of work processes. This definition also suggests that those who are being retrained are adults since they must have spent some period of time practicing the original skill.

Retraining may involve the acquisition of a completely new skill or the addition of new competencies to a basic skill which was previously acquired, as when an employee is trained as a multi-skilled worker. In most cases the multi-skilled worker has a thorough knowledge of a basic skill and is then trained in particular elements of other broader skill areas.

Retraining is generally skill specific, especially when it occurs in industry. It may be classroom-based, workshop-based, or consist of open learning programmes. It may also be a combination of all three. The learning process involves instruction, practice, and supervision with the possible use of simulation and other teaching techniques. Confining retraining to skill specific competencies enables the employer to train workers in exactly those skills that are required for the job, thus enabling a faster response to production needs and maintenance of cost effectiveness.

SKILLS

Education, Training and Skills are the three concepts which structure this thesis. Like education and training, the term skills is used flexibly in this thesis. It may refer to skills which incorporate a high level of physical dexterity, for example welding or joinery, or it may cover affective skills such as dealing with people. As Cockburn points out in her article "the Nature of Skill: the Case of the Printers", skill is a "complex concept". (Cockburn, 1985(b), p. 139) Skill has different meanings in different contexts and different meanings for individuals as opposed to organisations. For the individual it is a personal attribute, it may mean pride in doing a job well; for organised labour it has a political dimension; and for the employer it is a commodity which can be bought and sold, so it has an exchange value.

Skill has been defined in numerous ways, although these definitions may essentially be categorised under two headings. The first is that commonly accepted by people outside of the social sciences, which refers to the degree of manual facility, to manipulative abilities, to the co-ordination of hand and brain in the completion of a task. These Beechey refers to as "objectively defined competencies". (Beechey, 1982, pp. 63-64)

The second and more useful in terms of this study is a socially defined definition of skill, a definition which considers the relationships between individuals in the workplace and between the individual and his/her work.⁴ Such social relationships also define the way individuals experience working life. This latter definition has several features, each of which will be examined in the course of the next few pages.

OBJECTIVELY DEFINED SKILLS

More suggests that, in common parlance, skill is an "alliance of manual skill with knowledge". He describes how we understand the skill of the carpenter as encompassing not simply the ability to saw and plane wood effectively and efficiently, but also knowledge of the different types of wood and joint which are appropriate for the job in hand. (More, 1980, p. 15)

It was clear in talking to the trainees and students who were interviewed as part of this research, that skill meant much more to them than just the ability to wield a tool effectively. For example, people frequently referred to the confidence that possessing these objective competencies would give them:

"Skill means the ability to do certain jobs and certain tasks. To be able to look at things and know how to go about fixing things." (Interview: 20 October, 1986)

"Skill means being good or useful at a job that you are confident with." (Interview: 3 November, 1986)

Braverman, following Marx, suggested that such objective definitions of skill were arbitrary, implying that no job was totally devoid of skill:

"There are few if any jobs, including all those classified as 'unskilled', in which the training period is actually zero." (Braverman, 1974, p. 432)

This apparent inconsistency and arbitrariness in the way skills are defined has been the subject of numerous studies. For example, Hall and Miller, in their survey of Skill Centre trainees found evidence of anomalies in the way skills are measured. They state that:

"In the construction and engineering industries electric-arc welding is normally accepted as being a semi-skilled job, requiring at most a six months' training period. In shipbuilding the trade is, however, viewed

as one which requires a full apprenticeship." (Hall and Miller, 1975, p. 47)

Hall and Miller do, however, accept that the calibre of skill required in each industry may differ, but suggest that differential levels of skill may not always be so rigid as this classification suggests. Therefore what has the appearance of an objective measurement of skill is, in fact, conditioned by socially constructed assumptions.

SUBJECTIVELY DEFINED SKILLS

There are problems in measuring skills in a purely objective fashion because objective competencies are enmeshed within a system of socially defined constructs. As mentioned earlier, the categories: skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled do not necessarily provide objective measurements of the skill content of different types of jobs. They may be merely convenient labels.

This is not to suggest that subjective definitions of skills should be ignored. On the contrary they are essential components in the way skills are experienced and judged by individuals. Beechey, for example, suggests that skill embodies "conventional definitions of occupational status", and can also refer to "control over the labour process". (Beechey, 1982, pp. 63-64) These ways of looking at skill, together with other categories used by Cynthia Cockburn in her study of male printworkers, are examined below. (Cockburn, 1983)

The Social Construction of Skill:

Jobs are sometimes defined as skilled for specific purposes, and this may be at variance with the actual objective skill content of the jobs. It is possible to discern within the literature three strands to the arguments around the social construction of

skilled jobs. The first is that workers themselves sought to define jobs as skilled to limit entry to such occupations through apprenticeships. The second suggests that it was a management tactic; and the third that it was part of workers' defensive strategy against management encroachment.

Earlier work in this area comes from Turner who examines rules for delimiting skill in the cotton industry. He focused on the apprenticeship system, this being the route by which entry to a skill was limited, and argues that workers initiated the process of skill construction. (Turner, 1962, quoted in More, 1982, p. 110) Turner did, however, stress that apprenticeship led eventually to the acquisition of genuine competencies, thus the distinctions between skilled and semi-skilled in the workplace were based on real differences. (Ibid., p. 20)

Employers also saw the advantages of maintaining the apprenticeship system since it ensured a supply of highly skilled workers and limited entry to management also. That is, until it was recognised that apprenticeships served to prevent increases in the number of skilled workers and the consequent cheapening of skills. (Turner, p. 195, quoted in More, p. 110) Wood has suggested that the social construction of skill can also be seen as a management device for coping with worker resistance through fragmentation of the workforce. (Wood, 1985, p. 87; Wood, 1987, p. 8)

More recently the idea that the social construction of skills was solely the domain of labour or management has been attacked. Penn, for example, using empirical evidence from his study of engineering and textile workers in Lancashire, demonstrates that strategies of exclusion were, in fact, attempts to maintain skill privileges in the face of attempts by management to deskill certain jobs. He explains that the creation and maintenance of socially constructed skill categories is a complex process:

"Skilled manual workers . . . do not necessarily embody a set of activities that are more difficult to perform or learn than the non-skilled, although objective difficulty of task may constitute the basis for skilled manual work. In one sense, the notion of 'skill' can be seen as a legitimating device for income differentials, but such differentials reflect the social determinants of 'skill' rather than act as their cause. Skilled manual work is a traditional category of British class society but, although tradition can be a powerful legitimating factor in wage negotiations, it cannot survive socially in a vacuum since it requires powerful supporting mechanisms if it is to persist in the face of attempts to eradicate it. . . . What preserves the skill of the loom overlooker are those rules that exclude other workers, either weavers themselves or mechanics These exclusive controls over the operation and utilization of machinery are crucial to the maintenance of manual skill." (Penn, 1985, p. 129)

Penn is suggesting that what appears as an exercise of control over the supply of labour and workers already engaged in production is, in actuality, an attempt to limit management's prerogatives in the workplace, ". . . to modify certain aspects of the fundamentally asymmetrical relationship of power involved in capitalist production, . . .". (Ibid., p. 132)

Cockburn sees skills in this way too. She regards skill as "partly a political phenomenon". By controlling entry into the printing trade, the print unions were able to exert greater influence over the execution of work. However, part of this process involved the elevation of the "old skills" to the realms of mythology. (Cockburn, 1985(a), p. 65; 1985(b), p. 133)

In contrast, Lee suggests that this complex arrangement should be looked at in a slightly different light, and makes the important point that employers might well have allowed or even encouraged craft restrictions. He asks whether employers were really so constrained by the trade unions and apprenticeship restrictions as other writers have suggested. Indeed a union which held tight control over its membership through

skill regulations could be a useful though inadvertent ally for management. In addition

Lee suggests that:

"It is equally plausible that perpetuating the idea of union resistance provided cover for over-reliance on old methods of training and for cheap labour practices. In short, one cannot overlook the possibility that apprenticeship restrictions might have crumbled much faster had they not actually been readily tolerated, even encouraged, by a larger number of employers." (Lee, 1979, pp. 35-37)

So retaining such restrictions may have been as beneficial for workers as for management.

Control and Autonomy:

It has already been acknowledged that no job is totally unskilled and the more skilled occupations require higher degrees of co-ordination between perceptual and motor activity. By using perception judiciously, by utilising a combination of knowledge of materials and tools, the worker exercises discretion and therefore control over the task in hand. Autonomy and control of the work environment are vital components of skilled work and an important source of individual and personal satisfaction. In addition the worker must be able to conceive of the end product in order to marshall the appropriate tools and materials and combine them effectively. Braverman offers the following description of skilled work:

". . . skill covers his [the skilled worker's] ability to imagine how things would appear in final form if such and such tools and materials were used . . . he can estimate accurately both aesthetic appeal and functional utility, organize his tools, his power and his materials in a way which accomplishes his task and gains him livelihood and recognition . . ." (Braverman, 1974, p. 444 note)

A number of students from West Biscop College expressed the satisfaction they gained from their involvement in a job from beginning to end and from being responsible and

in control of each of those stages. As Paul, a student on the Estimating Course explained:

"It [skill] means being able to build a wall. It is the finished product, job satisfaction. I just enjoy it, I like building and constructing things. I like to see the job at the end "the house that Paul built". (Interview 8 January, 1987)

Control and autonomy are universally recognised as integral to skilled work. Hinton, for example, writing in the 1900s of engineering craftsmen clearly links skill with control and autonomy. Littler states that:

"Inside every engineering worker, according to Hinton, lay an image of the traditional millwright, a worker who could do a job from start to finish without interference or intervention from the employer." (Hinton, 1973, pp. 96-97, quoted in Littler, 1982, p. 8)

The confidence and ability to execute a job of work from beginning to end, to make decisions, plan ahead and complete the task was frequently referred to in pleasurable terms by the trainees and students. Pleasure was strongly associated with autonomy.

Frequently trainees and students talked of pride in doing a job well. This shop steward, for example, rated his skills as very important to him:

"I feel it is pride in the job. I do not think I would get the same pride out of doing a menial task. A menial task can be socially useful but when I have produced something of a skilled nature, I can appreciate it in the same way as a person who has written a piece of music. I am in there somewhere. I can go to a job years after and know I have done it because of the way it is done. You develop your own skills after you have done your apprenticeship." (Interview: 10 January, 1987)

And for one of the tutors at West Biscop his skill was also his hobby:

"I think you could say that woodworking is my hobby as well as my job. When I get the opportunity I make pieces of furniture. I made a couple of clock cases. I wish I could carve for instance. I do not know what my wife would say about it. There is pride in being able to say I have made that chair. It is not just a way of earning a living." (Interview: 8 June, 1987)

The skilled worker imparts some of his/herself into the product, and as Cockburn explains identifies with the quality of that product. The same applies to efficiency and speed in the execution of a task, as she explains:

"These same people realise that they are exploiting themselves on the employers' behalf if they press themselves. But they are tempted to continue to do for pleasure what their political acuity tells them is foolish. It is the contradiction of any craftsman caught up in capitalist production." (Cockburn, 1983, p. 106)

The shipbuilding workers of the North East of England in Brown and Brannen's study also expressed personal satisfaction and pleasure in being able to exercise their skills, despite the difficult and unpleasant working conditions in the shipyards: the "Cold, noise, dirt, confined spaces, [or] the hazards of working at considerable heights or with noxious substances" Brown and Brannen argue therefore that these were not alienated workers. (Brown and Brannen, 1970(a), p. 199)

Tacit Skills:

The final point worth mentioning when looking at definitions of skill is that skill involves both conscious and unconscious thought. Unconscious thought tackles the routine tasks thus leaving the conscious part of the brain to tackle the unexpected when it arises. An analogy is often made to driving a motor vehicle, as Wood explains:

". . . the performance of 'routine' tasks involves a process of learning whereby skills are acquired through experience. The example of driving shows the way in which routines are developed through the interaction of both conscious and unconscious processes. At the early stages of learning such skills, too much conscious thought may be counter-productive leading to poor judgement and coordination. The transformation of learning into successful routine performance is a process of internalizing patterned movements and reduced awareness. The learning of dance routines, typing, operating presses, for example, all involve a relation between the mind and body, enabling the actions to be successfully repeated without full awareness." (Wood, 1985, p. 86)

Tacit skills are associated with that unconscious thought, and tacit knowledge is assumed to be essential for skill acquisition. The implication is that workers are not automatons, that there is much to skill acquisition which is not readily apparent and cannot be destroyed by simplifying a work task. Being a worker in a production plant means more than turning out articles according to specification. Many more skills, both technical and social come into play. Wood offers several examples of this:

"For example, in Wilkinson's (1982) case of the optical lens manufacturer, several skilled lens grinders, who could nominally have been displaced by a greater reliance on computer programmed production, were retained in order to exploit their experience and knowledge of the grinding operations. Similar examples can be found in the white-collar area, where for example the word processor may eliminate certain tasks, but requires for its effective utilization the contribution of the workers' existing knowledge, as well as initiative for exploring its potential." (Wood, 1987, p. 13)

Many of the students at West Biscop were cognisant of these tacit skills, although they applied different labels:

"Skill is something which takes a while to acquire. You cannot just learn it. A lot of it is experience, not just knowledge." (Interview: 20 October, 1986)

Tutors for the Wood Trades course sought these burgeoning tacit skills in new recruits to their course. As two different tutors remarked:

"We can tell within half a day whether a young man is going to be a joiner. If he cannot cut a line there is no point. Joinery is all about lengths and accurate lengths. It is co-ordination between hand, eye and brain. And some have not got it. Even some of your most educated men cannot do it. They have either got this ability or they have not. We had a lad who could hardly read or write. Yet he went through a full apprenticeship. When he made anything you could see he was a joiner." (Interview: 1 May, 1987)

"I can tell you who will make a good joiner when you see them run their fingers over moldings and try doors. They do not carve an object, they release the object from the raw material." (Interview: 5 January, 1987)

These tacit skills are sometimes wholly and sometimes partly technical in nature. These are the skills that management increasingly seek to develop through the use of quality circles, as Wood further explains:

"There are many skills required in the production process, including congeniality, 'mucking in' and elements of obedience. Of special significance, given the integrated nature of production, is workers' awareness of the way their jobs relate to the production process. . . . Such skill involves an ability to spot the problems that can arise in jobs which are related to one another, problems which are rooted in transfer systems, differential capacity levels and variable production rates."⁵ (Wood, 1985, p. 86)

Helen Rainbird also recognises this. She states that:

". . . despite management attempts to extend control through the division of labour and the categorisation of certain types of work as requiring little or no skill, workers reskill the intellectual and manual content of their jobs autonomously. It is precisely this 'untapped energy and skill of . . . workers who have learnt from their own experience' (TGWU 1979, p. 5) that quality circles attempt to exploit and which could form a means both of increasing productivity and of dignifying work if workers exercised real control over the labour process." (Rainbird, 1986, p. 11)

There are other, non-technical tacit skills which management are keen to harness. These may be defined simply as good work habits. But they are heavily influenced by conditions outside of the factory gates and by the pride and satisfaction inherent in 'a job well done'.

The concept of skill, therefore, encompasses so much more than simply being able to perform physically or mentally in a particular way. Each skill and level of skill carries with it a unique set of social relations. Skill dictates how individuals relate to each other and this is discussed at length in Chapters 9 and 10.

THE TRAINING AGENCY

At various points in this thesis the government's training arm is referred to by name. At the time of the research it went under the name of the Manpower Services Commission and was a quasi-autonomous government organisation which was answerable to the Secretary of State for Employment. Following the transfer of its employment division to the Department of Employment it was officially renamed the Training Commission on 26 May 1988. Then again in September 1988 following a vote taken at the TUC annual conference not to support the government's new adult training scheme, Employment Training, the Commission was disbanded and reconstituted as the Training Agency within the Department of Employment. At the same time, Sir Brian Wolfson was appointed as the new permanent chairman.

When discussing events prior to September 1987 this governmental organisation is referred to as the Manpower Services Commission or MSC. Similarly when discussing events between May 1988 and September 1988 it is referred to as the Training Commission and the Training Agency after that time.

QUALITY

Throughout the thesis reference is made to "quality" training and retraining. For the purposes of this research the term "quality" describes training which is of immediate use to the trainee but which can be built upon in the future. It is generally taken to mean longer term training including general competency based skills as well as more specific skills. It is basically training which provides skills which are useful to the

trainee as well as the enterprise.

STATUS

When an individual undergoes retraining, he or she is potentially moving from one stage of their lives to another. They move from being unskilled or semi-skilled to being skilled, or from being skilled in one area to acquiring yet another skill. So in the simplest sense of the word the individual experiences a shift in "status". However, status, like social class, commonly embodies certain notions of life style, and ideas of how individuals relate to one another. Chapter 10 looks at the way in which individuals who have made this transition take up these ideas and how it affects the way they see themselves and their place in the world. This transition is examined in social class terms but only insofar as the two concepts of status and class overlap in individuals' subjective views of changes occurring in their lives.

GENDER RELATED ISSUES

The object of the research was to look at adult job retraining in industry and further education. The selection of the seven companies and the particular college of further education was based on the fact that they were all actively retraining adults and were prepared to take part in the research. No attempt was made to select organisations on the basis of the number of male or female employees they were training. The fact that all the trainees and students were male is purely unintentional from the point of view of the research, but it may be indicative of the extent to which women workers are

not being retrained, and is interesting from that point of view. This is a significant issue which should not be dismissed. However, it is beyond the limited concerns of this particular piece of research and has therefore not been pursued.

ETHNICITY

The explanation given above also applies to issues of ethnicity. It is, however, recognised that another research project which was located in a different part of the country, although it dealt with these same issues, would possibly find it necessary to place particular emphasis on issues of race and ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

The thesis has been divided up into sections in the hope that this will produce a clearer picture of the issues involved.

Part One includes only one chapter, Chapter 2, which reviews national government manpower policy and the way in which it has developed historically.

Part Two includes three chapters on Further Education. Chapter 3 looks at the way further education has developed in response to changes in government policy and outlines the structure of further education as it was prior to the 1988 Education Reform Bill. Account is also taken of elements in this recent legislation which affected further

education. Chapter 4 focuses on one college of further education, West Biscop. The structure of the college, its curriculum as it relates to this research, and its relationship with the Manpower Services Commission are examined in detail. The next chapter is about retraining courses for adults at West Biscop College. It looks at staff, students and the retraining process.

Part Three covers retraining for adults in industry. The first chapter in this section, Chapter 6, looks at national manpower policy as it relates directly to industry and the way in which industry has responded to this policy. Chapter 7 focuses on the three chemical companies and the circumstances under which retraining took place. The final chapter in this part, Chapter 8, describes the type of retraining which took place in all of the companies studied.

Part Four contains two chapters which look at the retraining experience from two different perspectives. The focus in chapter 9 is on the retraining which takes place in industry. It looks at the way skill is continually being reconstructed, and the way in which retraining forms part of that reconstruction. Chapter 10 is about those individuals who through retraining made a transition from one stage in their lives to another. It asks whether retraining affects the way individuals see themselves or their place in the world or whether it changes their lives materially. This chapter focuses principally on the students at West Biscop College.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 11, attempts to bring together the various parts of the thesis and to tease out the relationship between government policy, educational practice and provision, and retraining in industry. It examines the limits to what has been achieved and speculates as to what can be achieved in the future.

NOTES

¹ Throughout this thesis pseudonyms are used in referring to all individuals and institutions in order to maintain confidentiality and preserve the anonymity of those who took part in the research.

² See Roger Penn and Barry Wigzell, "The Attitudes and Responses of Trades Unions to Technical Change: A Case Study of Maintenance Workers in the North West of England", The Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics 2 (1987), 5.

³ For a detailed discussion of the distinction commonly made between education and training see the following:

Allen Parrott, "Lifelong Education and Training", Adult Education 48:5 (January 1976), 301-307.

J. L. Thompson, "The Concept of Training and its Current Distortion", Adult Education 49 (1976-77), 146-153.

⁴ Lee, for example discusses the "ambiguity of the concept of skill itself". He implies that to talk about skills in terms of "typical levels of dexterity and/or knowledge" may be misleading. He confirms that skill is also a social construct and cannot be fully understood without reference to historical and industrial settings. (D. J. Lee, "Skill, Craft and Class: A Theoretical Critique and a Critical Case", Sociology 15 (1981), 56.)

More also acknowledges this ambiguity but his notion of skill as a social construct focuses on its exclusive nature in the "artificial delimitation of certain work as skilled". (C. More, "Skill and the Survival of Apprenticeship" in The Degradation of Work? Skill, Deskillng and the Labour Process, S. Wood (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 110.)

⁵ See also: R. M. Blackburn and M. Mann, The Working Class in the Labour Market, (London, Macmillan, 1979); T. Manwaring 1984 and S. Wood, "The Ghost of the Labour process" in Job Redesign: Organisation and Control of the Labour Process, ed. D. Knights et al (London: Heinemann, 1985), pp. 171-193, who describe the way in which managers seek out tacit skills as part of recruitment procedures. Quoted in S. Wood, "Work Organisation" in Work Culture and Society, ed. R. Deem and G. Salaman, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 75-99).

PART ONE

POLICY

CHAPTER 2

TRAINING AND RETRAINING FOR ADULTS

GOVERNMENT POLICY REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at government policy as it relates to the training and retraining of adults. An examination of the effect of policy on both further education and industry reveals two diverging strains. These may be classified as follows: first, policy as it relates to training for employment which includes government training programmes for the unemployed; and second, policy which is designed to promote and shape industrial training within the education system. The objective for both policies is the same: the achievement of an adequately educated, highly trained, flexible workforce. Although these two branches of policy are designed to influence different sectors, they are intertwined and overlap in their effects. For example, many further education colleges

have, for some years, provided training and education courses under government sponsored programmes. Each of these aspects of policy are therefore best understood in relation to the other. However, it is possible to separate them out for detailed examination, which is precisely what this chapter aims to do with reference to the first theme, that is policy on training and retraining of adults for employment.

This chapter attempts a chronological account of shifts in emphasis in government training and manpower policy, that is training and retraining for employment. Training policy which is designed to have an impact upon training and retraining within the education system is dealt with in Chapter 3. Using official reports and Acts of Parliament as points of reference, Chapter 2 outlines a chronology which suggests a progression away from a laissez-faire approach, representative of the 19th and early 20th century, to a degree of interventionism culminating in the 1973 Employment and Training Act. This is followed by a return to a rhetoric of deregulation and voluntarism in the 1980s. The chapter also traces the influence of consensus politics in the formulation of training policy and suggests a break-up of that consensus in the 1980s. While the primary focus is on the late 1970s and 1980s, it is also necessary to trace the origins of the institutional arrangements and public policy thrust which are characteristic of the last ten years.

In locating issues historically, specific policy changes can be better understood in the light of a broader panorama of policy direction and thus avoid distortion. The tendency, for example, in the last ten years towards the break up of the tripartite consensus and towards the underwriting of interventionism can best be understood by reference to the present government's emerging relationship with the trade unions, and the historically limited involvement of business and industry in training. This limited involvement continued despite repeated, but often restrained, attempts by government to place the

responsibility for training with employers. By the late 1980s, the rhetoric of voluntarism still stood as it had, to varying degrees of intensity, over the last 100 years. However, the break up of the tripartite consensus allowed for state intervention through a new consensus partnership involving business and industry.

The mid-19th century is chosen as a starting point since it is at this time that a general awareness of Britain's declining international competitiveness developed.¹ This decline was linked to the quality and quantity of education and training provision. Later, more emphasis is given to the post-1945 period because it is here we see the greatest shifts in policy. A shift from a 19th century laissez-faire policy with its emphasis on voluntary participation by individuals and employers and an ideological reluctance to accept centralised manpower planning, to the establishment of the Engineering Training Boards (ITBs) in 1964 and the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) 10 years later. I have drawn on the work of Stringer and Richardson (Stringer and Richardson, 1982) and Anderson and Fairley (Anderson and Fairley, 1983) who suggest that policy making decisions in Britain are, or were, based on consensus, and this shaped the nature of policy decisions and the resultant legislation. It is suggested in this chapter that since 1979, and the election of a new Conservative Government, there has been a shift away from that consensus which, following 1945, incorporated the trade union movement and resulted in trade union representation on various bodies including the National Economic Development Council (NEDC) and the Manpower Services Commission. After 1979, and with the publication of the New Training Initiative (NTI) in 1981, more emphasis was placed on employers' responsibilities to train, and the MSC began to promote its role as a catalyst, or facilitator of training and training courses rather than as a key provider. At this time there was an almost imperceptible move away from consensus politics, and in the latter half of the 1980s, the tripartite balance within the

MSC was disrupted with the appointment of additional representatives from industry to the Commission.

The gradual move away from more centralised control to market-led strategies culminated in the 1988 White Paper, "Employment for the 1990s", which outlined the role of the new Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), based on the American system of Private Industry Councils. In many ways this White Paper was seen as the realisation of the 1981 New Training Initiative which placed responsibility for training firmly with the employer and advocated localised control of manpower planning. The White Paper followed the disbandment of the Manpower Services Commission, recently renamed the Training Commission (TC). The disbandment of the Commission was generally acknowledged to be a response to the Trade Union Congress (TUC) vote in the Autumn of 1988 to withdraw support from the government's new scheme for long-term unemployed adults.² The role of organised labour within the newly established Training Agency (TA) and the regionalised TECs with their emphasis on decentralised, industry-led manpower planning with local delivery, was not clear at this time, but evidence suggests that it will be considerably reduced, relative to their involvement in the Training Commission and the Area Manpower Boards.

Alongside this there is one other developmental strand which bears brief examination, and this relates to the quality and nature of retraining for the unemployed. When the MSC was established in 1974 its first programme (Training Opportunities Scheme [TOPS]) was aimed specifically at adults, but as youth unemployment rose, finance and effort was directed at ameliorating this problem mainly through Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and eventually the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). It was not until 1983 with the publication of the White Paper and the launching of the Adult Training Strategy that unemployed adults were channelled into training courses in any great

number. Initially, youth training emphasised training for employment, but as unemployment increased this became an unrealistic proposition, at least in the short term, and the emphasis shifted to longer-term quality training. Adult training took the reverse trajectory. The longer TOPS courses in government skill centres and further education colleges, which were later subsumed under the Adult Training Strategy (ATS), were replaced firstly with the New Job Training Scheme (NJTS) and later Employment Training (ET). The desired result was to shorten the training period and increase the numbers of individuals being trained. It has been suggested that the government's intention, in providing programmes for the unemployed in the 1980s, has been no more than to effect an improvement in the published unemployment statistics and to "cheapen" the training, thus implying a reduction in quality.³

All this suggests that it was the government's intention to place the responsibility for the so-called "quality" training and retraining firmly with the employer, whilst public money was directed towards short-term training for those under 25 and the long term unemployed. This had consequences for the further education system which has traditionally provided this type of longer term "quality" training with public funding, which is now intended to be the responsibility of industry.

This thesis is about skills retraining for adults, and therefore it is not intended that this chapter concern itself in any detail with the type of training and retraining provided by the government for young people under the Youth Training Scheme or the long term unemployed under Employment Training. These schemes are mentioned only insofar as they provide illustrations of the overall theme and direction of public training policy.

Although it can be argued that these government funded training schemes are designed to do more than simply provide industry with an army of well trained workers,

for example the electoral value of maintaining published unemployment figures at a manageably low level, the former has been a recurring theme since manpower planning was recognised as a priority issue by government, as far back as the middle of the 19th century.⁴

FROM EARLY FEARS TO GOVERNMENT TRAINING CENTRES (1835 TO 1945)

In the mid-19th century fears that Britain was losing its competitive edge over Germany and the United States provoked consternation concerning the quality of the workforce. P.J.C. Perry states that the report of the Devonshire Commission, which met between 1872 and 1875, offered the " . . .first specific references to the dangers of neglect on the national economy" and notes, within the document, one of the first references to "training". (Perry, 1976, p30)

An even earlier reference is to be found in the recently published government white paper "Employment for the 1990s". It quotes Richard Cobden, writing in 1835, after returning from a visit to the United States, as noting that: ' . . . our only chance of national prosperity lies in the timely remodelling of our system, so as to put it nearly as possible on an equality with the improved management of the Americans.'⁵ This suggests that international comparisons of economic competitiveness are not solely a modern preoccupation.

Throughout the 19th century there followed a series of reports from various commissions including The Royal Commission on Technical Instruction of 1884, the Samuelson Commission which met between 1882 and 1884, the Commission on Depression in Trade and Industry of 1886 and the Commercial Education Report. Each of these drew unfavourable comparisons between technical education in Britain and that of its overseas competitors, particularly Germany and the United States. Industry was criticised for failing to adapt to technical and structural changes, as was the vocational education system. However, as Perry suggests, the evidence unearthed by these Commissions did little to effect a change in government attitudes in favour of centralised manpower planning. The reluctance, it seems, was both ideological and practical when faced with the enormous problem of defining global needs. It was not until after the First World War that attitudes altered. (Perry, 1976, p. 30)

During the years up until the Second World War reports on the relationship between education and industry continued to be produced. Both the Balfour Committee of 1924 to 1929 and the Malcolm Committee of 1925-28 came to similar conclusions and advocated a need for long term planning and an improvement in the quality of training. (Perry, 1976, p. 38-39) The evidence suggests an ideological shift on the part of government at this time on the use of training as a means of coping with high levels of unemployment. Hall and Miller describe how the 'instructional factories' set up in 1917 to train disabled ex-servicemen were, in 1925, adapted for training the unemployed. It seems the reputation of such centres subsequently suffered as the trainees failed to find employment. For the young, Juvenile Unemployment Centres were opened first in 1918, and in 1930 they were reorganised and renamed Junior Instruction Centres. The equivalent for adults were Government Training Centres designed to preserve or inculcate habits of discipline and self-respect, increase

adaptability and retain employability, but unfortunately without training in specific skills.
(Hall and Miller, 1975, p.41)

During the 1939-45 war centralised control was accepted as a necessity in training as in other areas of economic life as part of the war effort, and the training centres were used once more to train a total of 525,000 men and women for urgent war work. These individuals were then employed under 'relaxation agreements' which were drawn up between employers and trade unions.⁶

FROM POST-WAR CONSENSUS TO TRAINING BOARDS

(1945 TO 1964)

The publication of reports continued throughout this period with the Percy Report in 1945, the Weeks Report in 1950 and the Barlow Report in 1955, each advocating expansion in either scientific or technical education. The pieces of legislation which had most impact on training policy during this period were the White Paper on Employment Policy of 1944 and the White Paper on Technical Education of 1956. The 1944 White Paper in keeping with Keynesian economic principles emphasised full employment and the need for appropriate training to be given by employers through the use of government grants. (Perry, 1976, p. 48) Perry also points out that the 1944 White Paper sought to retain the flexibility which had been achieved during war-time. However, trade union attitudes were reportedly ambiguous; although recognising the need for reform, they were anxious to safeguard job security and maintain a strong bargaining position. (Ibid., p. 60)

The second white paper came as a response to the reports published during the early part of this period and in acknowledgement of the rapid scientific and technological advances being made in other countries, especially the Soviet Union. This White Paper on Technical Education announced a major reorganisation of the vocational education system and the investment of 85 million pounds in England and Wales and 12 million in Scotland. (Ibid., p. 41)

On 11 February 1958, the Carr Report was published. The report concerned itself with the training of young workers only, but helped focus attention on training generally, and crystallise the issues involved. Although this paper was regarded as representing a turning point in public opinion and government policy, its recommendations were less than radical and distinctly laissez-faire. (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 23)

Even Carr himself, architect of the report and Minister of Labour at the time, believed that training was industry's responsibility and government involvement should come only as a last resort. Speaking in 1958 at a Royal Society of Arts Conference Carr offered the following guarded statement:

"I do not think that the first steps can be effectively undertaken by the Government, but . . . if industry gets down to its plans and then finds difficulty in implementing them, I believe the Government ought to, and I believe it would be prepared to, examine sympathetically any suggestions put forward by industry." (Perry, 1976, p. 74)

Industry appears to have accepted this situation willingly preferring to hold at arms length the spectre of state involvement, as this statement from Sir Hugh Beaver, President of the Confederation of British Industries illustrates:

"Industry has a new role to play . . . to initiate, to sponsor, and in fact civilise. Either industry must accept this or we must hand over our whole life and being to the care of the state; and that would be the end of a free democracy as we know it." (Ibid., p. 76)

An example of the post-war consensus that was characteristic of training policy in Britain at the time, was the establishment of the Industrial Training Council in July of 1958. It was established jointly by the British Employers' Confederation and the TUC in July of 1958 in response to Carr. The Council survived six years and its brief included collecting and disseminating information on training and monitoring recruitment and training practices. (Ibid., pp. 75-78)

Clearly these reports and the white papers failed to have any real impact on training. Indeed, up until the early sixties government preferred a laissez-faire approach to training policy, and as Anderson and Fairley point out, confined itself to providing Government Training Centres to cater for 'residual' groups in the labour market,⁷ to advising employers on training standards and to encouraging expansion in the general education sector to provide an 'Infrastructure for industrial investment in training'. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 194)

Although, as the statement from Sir Hugh Beaver illustrates, some sectors of industry were clearly concerned to lay claim to their responsibility to train their own workers, by 1962 the Industrial Training Council was expressing dissatisfaction with the role which industry was playing. Finally, in 1964, the Industrial Training Act expressed in policy form the opinion that the unco-ordinated decisions of individual firms were not a suitable basis upon which to build a national training policy, and that without economic incentive, private industry was unlikely to invest in training. Thus the government moved closer to acknowledging the need for a co-ordinated national manpower policy through a modified level of state intervention.

THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING ACT 1964

If the Carr Report signposted the direction in which policy was to proceed, the Industrial Training Act represented a genuine milestone in state intervention in training. However, as Stringer and Richardson point out, there was, at this time, a lack of any "recognisable policy community or machinery" through which change might be implemented. Also absent was pressure for change from either the trade unions, who were concerned to protect traditional control over the apprenticeship system, or from employer organisations who seemed to prefer rhetoric to action. (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 24)

Soon, two elements came together which provided the circumstances under which policy change could be implemented. Firstly a new Minister, John Hare, took up an appointment as the Minister of Labour in 1960. As Stringer and Richardson explain, this was fortuitous since

"As Crossman observed, a new Minister always provides a good opportunity to 'float' a departmental policy, and Hare was anxious to make an impression, to defend the Ministry against critics and against the possible 'capture' of training by the Department of Education." (ibid., p. 24)

At the same time, some concern over a lack of any coordinated training policy, stimulated by a recognition of manpower policy developments in other countries, was developing at the periphery of a loose network of employers, trade unionists and other affected groups. There was also a growing perception that 'voluntarism' had failed to solve the problem of skill shortages. As Stringer and Richardson acknowledge, there

was no strong pressure for government intervention, although there was no real opposition either. (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 24) Anderson and Fairley also point to a "growing commitment" within the Conservative Party to economic planning. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 193)

The Industrial Training Bill received royal assent on 12 March 1964 and provided for the establishment of twenty-seven Industrial Training Boards covering fifteen and a half million employees out of a total working population of twenty-five million. They were conceived as autonomous bodies answerable only to the industries which they served and upon which they imposed a levy, although part of their finance was made up of money from central government. They were entrusted with the task of raising the level of training both qualitatively and quantitatively. A Central Training Council was also set up, whose responsibility it was to advise the Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity on matters relating to industrial and commercial training and the 1964 Act.

The remit for the Training Boards included advising industry on training courses and providing or securing approved training courses for their industry. They were also empowered to impose a levy on employers within their industry which was returned in the form of grants and loans to pay for approved training. Grants could be levied up to four per cent of payroll costs. The Engineering Industry Training Board set the highest levy at two and a half per cent.

Although this could be regarded as direct intervention in training, the autonomous nature of the Boards was a significant feature of the Act since this allowed for a modified form of government intervention. This was in keeping with the oft stated belief that industrial training was the responsibility of industry and indeed much of industry resented government intervention. As Anderson and Fairley suggest, it was intervention

'at arms length' through a tripartite system of Training Boards which were to an extent self-financing. They describe the arrangement as ". . . a rather weak form of institutionalised 'co-operation' - the National Economic Development Council being the most frequently cited example." (ibid., p. 194) Nevertheless the Act was designed to place some of the costs of retraining with employers and 'to share the cost of training more evenly between firms'. (Ministry of Labour Guide to the Industrial Training Act, quoted in Maurice Kaufman, 1986, pp. 142)

Protests against the Act emerged from several sources and the loudest were those of the small firms who felt they were paying for services they did not require. They were eventually relieved of the levy obligation in 1971. Kaufman suggests that in relieving small firms of the obligation to pay the levy, one of the original tenets of the Act, that is, to distribute the costs of training evenly amongst employers, was demolished. Both large and small firms found the system cumbersome and bureaucratic. Some large companies might have a number of establishments which came under the ambit of more than one board, each of which could have different levy-grant regulations and procedures. There were also complaints about lack of expertise exhibited by some training board staff. (ibid., p. 143)

The consensus which led to the passage of the Act was flawed. Kaufman describes how the five years it took to establish the twenty-seven Boards were marked by "complaining and threatening, particularly on the part of smaller companies, which had so far done little or no training themselves but who were quite content to continue to poach the few people trained by others." There was discontent in parliament too, from those on the right who deplored any form of state intervention. Enoch Powell coined the term, "The Great Training Robbery" and this became a rallying cry for the discontented in industry. (Perry, 1976, pp. 276-277)

It seems the pressure finally became too intense and the government of the day instituted a review of the 1964 Act which was published in 1972 as a Green Paper entitled "Training for the Future - A Plan for Discussion. According to Kaufman the Green Paper, "conceded most of the case of the protestors and was clearly meant to pave the way for the quiet demise of the statutory system." (Kaufman, 1976, p. 134). A section of the business community were unhappy with the Act, and this section was large or powerful enough to effect a change in policy. According to Anderson and Fairley this was not however the only influence for reform. The organisation of the Training Boards was simply inadequate to deal with the perceived needs. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 196)

However, the performance of the economy relative to international competitors continued to be a cause for concern and the decline in the manufacturing sector made redeployment and retraining of displaced workers a pressing issue. By the early 1970s, as recession deepened, problems were exacerbated by industry's continuing reluctance to invest in long-term skill training, and the level of industrial training fell sharply, especially apprenticeship training. Added to this, youth unemployment had begun to rise and reached a level of 58,500, causing some consternation. The ideological climate was still undergoing change, so the scene was set for a new approach to training policy. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 195)

THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACT 1973

The 1973 Act was the creation of a Conservative government and enacted under the Labour leadership of Harold Wilson. Like the 1964 Act, but going one step further, it appears to have been designed to appease the demands of the employers' lobby whilst acknowledging the necessity of a nationally co-ordinated and centralised manpower policy.

This extension was crucial and its acceptance signified a shift in thinking by both industry and government. Although there were undoubtedly some employers who balked at the thought of government intervention, this was not universal. At the same time that the Conservative Government was preparing its 1972 Green Paper "Training for the Future", the CBI carried out a consultation exercise amongst two hundred of its member organisations. The conclusion was, as Stringer and Richardson point out that:

"Given all the faults and shortcomings of the present system, the CBI considers that it (the 1964 Act) can provide a sound base for developing future strategy in industrial training . . .". (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 26)

Nor were the unions totally happy with the Green Paper proposals. Despite the fact that, in 1964 the TUC under the leadership of Frank Cousins had argued for a central training body to widen and co-ordinate training, there were, within the labour movement, divided views. Opposition came mainly from the craft unions who suspected that training on a mass scale might weaken their traditional control over apprenticeships. (Jackson, 1986, p. 28) Thus, neither the CBI nor the TUC were happy to see the levy-grant system dismantled.

The Act was in effect another compromise, the ITBs were to remain but the levy-grant system emerged as a levy-grant exemption system whereby a company's training activity was measured in terms of its own needs. If these needs were not met, a levy was to be imposed. An upper levy limit was set at one per cent. This appears to have satisfied the small firms.

The TUC and others within the Government clearly saw the need for closer co-ordination and control of training, especially in the light of rising levels of unemployment and two existing agencies, the Training Services Agency (TSA) and the Employment Services Agency (ESA) which had been established within the Department of Employment to run its placement activities were to become the executive arms of a new Manpower Services Commission, a statutory body responsible to the Secretary of State for Employment. (Ibid., p. 29)

The role as first envisaged for the MSC was limited and tentative, as Jackson points out:

"The government was still very wary of creating a powerful new empire outside its own control, and made it plain that it saw the Commission primarily as a policy planning and co-ordinating body, through which the operational agencies would report - not as a super agency which would take over from them." (Ibid., p. 29)

The MSC was to replace the Central Training Council which, under the 1964 Act, was merely an advisory body, with no power and few resources at its disposal, in offering advice to the Secretary of State on training matters. It also took over the previous function of the Secretary of State which involved co-ordinating the work of the Training Boards. The operating costs for the Training Boards were funded by the government through the MSC, and the Commission was financed by an annual grant from the

Treasury. The Commission was officially constituted on 1 February 1974 with a full-time chairman and director, Sir Dennis Barnes. (Perry, 1976, p. 302)

As with the Industrial Training Boards, tripartite representation was maintained, and appointments were made through consultation with the TUC and CBI. Education and local government were also given representation. Tripartism was maintained at local level with the establishment of the Area Manpower Boards in 1983.

The Manpower Services Commission through the Employment Services Agency were to take responsibility for the 950 employment offices and job centres throughout the country; and, through the Training Services Agency, would be responsible for co-ordinating the work of the ITBs and for running the existing Training Opportunities Programme, principally aimed at unemployed adults. Courses were offered mainly through colleges of further education and the fifty-five state-owned skill centres. The country was to be divided into seven regions and there were to be fifty-one district offices.^{8 & 9} (Gaint, 1988)

What the MSC was able to do well is to introduce new training schemes and render them operational with high intake levels within a few months. It did not, however, achieve any real independence from government, since government controlled the pursestrings and the Secretary of State for Employment had the power to direct the Commission. Nonetheless there was evidence of dissent and disagreement from time to time between the MSC and the Department of Employment.¹⁰

A NEW TRAINING INITIATIVE - 1981

The period prior to the New Training Initiative was a time of some apparent contradiction in government policy. Expenditure on special programmes for the young unemployed increased while it seemed that rising adult unemployment was viewed as less urgent. This was also a period of rapid growth in MSC expenditure to service the Special Programmes. Whereas by 1981 the decision was taken by government to withdraw from direct support of skills training in industry and to abolish sixteen of the twenty-three Industrial Training Boards. In addition expansion of the Training Opportunities programme which offered skills training for adults was cut towards the end of the decade and never reached its anticipated goal of providing 100,000 training places. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 198)

By this time the Conservative government was publicly declaring their objective of drastically reducing state intervention in the economy and cutting public expenditure. Public investment in skills training, especially for adults, was being reduced, whereas expenditure on special programmes designed to help the young unemployed increased. Youth unemployment was a politically sensitive area and demanded measures which would effectively contain it at levels acceptable to the electorate.

This is one explanation; Anderson and Fairley, however, imply that this apparent contradiction is due in part to what they refer to as the "institutional influence of MSC in policy formulation"; and this was especially clear in the next government White Paper on training which outlined the New Training Initiative. They make reference to the work of Dutton, in suggesting that:

"In one sense, MSC's concerns has been to reformulate its own role . . . in a manner which would permit some expansion even under a monetarist administration." (ibid., p. 205)

The New Training Initiative appeared first as a consultative document in May of 1981 published by the MSC, and it set out three main proposals which were presented as inter-related aspects of the same task. The first was to attend to skill shortages through the modernisation of skill training including apprenticeships which meant a shift from a time-served basis to agreed standards of competence; the second advocated the establishment of a vocational programme that provided every young person under the age of 18 with either full-time education or a training placement with an employer (Manpower Services Commission, May 1981); and finally, comes the first explicit reference to adult training:

"... we must open up widespread opportunities for adults, whether employed, unemployed or returning to work, to acquire, increase or update their skills and knowledge during the course of their working lives." (Manpower Services Commission, May 1981, p. 4)

The Consultative Document was followed in December 1981 by a government white paper, "A New Training Initiative: A Programme for Action", which was the first of several White Papers which have set out the policy of the Conservative Party on training and education. In addition to the three items listed above one more important feature makes the Act representative of the Conservative Party's response to training issues. The white paper clearly insisted that responsibility for training must lie with employers and stated that:

"In the longer term the responsibility for training must lie mainly with employers, as it does in most other major industrial countries. It is only in this way that we can ensure that training meets industry's real needs". (Employment, Department of, December 1981, p. 12)

As if to underline this point, a month before the publication of the White Paper, the government closed sixteen of the twenty-three Industrial Training Boards. Although the closures were in keeping with the government's emphasis on voluntarism in training

and provided the opportunity to transfer the £51,000,000 of operating costs to industry, Stringer and Richardson also view the decision as the outcome of a 'power struggle . . . between these two component elements of the training system", between the MSC and the Industrial Training Boards. (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 3) Writing in the early eighties, shortly after the publication of the Employment and Training Act (1981), they explain that:

"MSC sees itself as playing a broad national role in the field of manpower policy. ITBs have a much narrower industry or sectoral focus. . . . The Boards' determination to remain as independent as possible has proved irksome and frustrating to MSC which apparently feels that the Boards have failed to respond to its priorities, thus hindering the MSC in achieving its broad objectives. The implication is clear. The MSC would gain by a cut in the number of ITBs." (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 31)

The MSC also placed this recommendation before the government. The government felt the cost of funding all the ITBs would be too much for industry so a number were eventually abolished. Thus it seems the 'sleight of hand' was completed, as Stringer Richardson explain:

" . . . neither the MSC, nor indeed the Government was directly to bear the responsibility for abolishing Training Boards, but industry itself." (Ibid., p. 31)

Anderson and Fairley, however, see the MSC's role as less conspiratorial. The MSC had completed a review of the 1973 Act and in it concurred with the views of the TUC and the ITBs themselves that the powers granted to the ITBs under the 1964 Act should be restored. The government rejected the MSC's two reports and ordered the closure of all but seven of the statutory Industrial Training Boards. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 200)

The abolition of the sixteen Boards appeared to please several interest groups, as Stringer and Richardson point out:

"From the Government's viewpoint it has reduced the degree of regulation of industry, abolished sixteen quangos, and has reduced public expenditure. From industry's viewpoint it has managed to rid itself of an irksome bureaucracy, as well as reducing costs, and from the MSC's viewpoint a number of boards have been removed from the relevant 'territory'." (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 34)

The trade unions were not, however, pleased with the outcome, and at the full MSC meeting in December 1981, the TUC Commissions voted against disbanding some of the Boards. (Ibid., p. 34)

This then seems to be a significant point in the gradual break-up of the consensus which dominated British training policy since 1945.

THE ADULT TRAINING STRATEGY - 1983

The Adult Training Strategy first appeared as a discussion paper published by the MSC in April 1983. (Manpower Services Commission, April 1983) It took up the third objective of the 1981 New Training Initiative (Employment, Department of, December 1981) which was:

"to open up widespread opportunities for adults, whether employed, unemployed or returning to work, to acquire, increase or update their skills and knowledge during the course of their working lives." (Manpower Services Commission, December, 1983, p. 1)

This discussion paper, "Towards an Adult Training Strategy" (Manpower Services Commission, April 1983) invited responses from interested parties which were circulated in December 1983, as were the MSC's "Adult Training Strategy: Proposals for Action". (Manpower Services Commission, December 1981; Employment, Department of, December 1981)

These were followed by the Government's White Paper "Training for Jobs" published in January 1984. (Employment, Department of, January 1984) The White paper incorporated many of the proposals in the discussion document together with details of a decision to transfer 25 per cent of work related non-advanced further education funding from local authorities to the Manpower Services Commission, thus increasing the MSC's and therefore central government's influence within further education. The white paper also reviewed progress made towards the achievement of the objectives set in the 1981 White Paper "A New Training Initiative: A Programme for Action". (Employment, Department of, December, 1981)

The Discussion Paper began by arguing a need for training by drawing attention to a decrease in available unskilled jobs and the increased demand for people with technical and professional skills; and all this within a time of economic recession. It therefore determined that the ". . . immediate emphasis of an adult training strategy should be economic".¹¹ (Manpower Services Commission, April 1983, p. 7) Two pages later, the document referred to an annual expenditure of over 200 million pounds for the existing Training Opportunities Scheme, designed to provide training to unemployed adults, and suggested that this "speculative training" may not be cost effective. (ibid., p. 9)

The argument focused attention on industry on the assumption that industry was aware of its requirements and therefore industry should be responsible for directing where and

what type of training was needed. This also implied a relative neglect of special programmes for unemployed adults. The Paper continued by acknowledging that unassisted voluntarism had failed to produce the trained workers the country needed and that responsibility for training should be shared. (Ibid., p. 7)

The document also emphasised efficient dissemination and use of labour market and training information; the need for a local response to local needs; the use of open learning systems and the need to develop a nationally recognised system of vocational qualifications based on standards of competence which took up objective 1 of the New Training Initiative. (Ibid., p. 8)

The MSC's perceived view of its role as a catalyst or 'pump-primer' was firmly woven into the Proposals for Action which just preceded the Government's White Paper. On a local level the MSC would help ". . . training providers and employers to get together in working out their respective requirements and problems; and . . . raise the profile of adult training among a wider public." (Manpower Services Commission, 1983(c), p. 8)

On a national level the MSC would help disseminate information about skill demands and training and would develop new more flexible training methods. This is a reference to the Open Tech and the use of distance learning.¹² (Ibid. p. 8)

Indeed the overall impression is one of contrived distance; of a facilitator working in the background. The document also proposed radical changes to the Commission's existing programmes for adults which had consisted mainly of TOPS provision and this was also laid out in the Government's White Paper in January of 1984. (Department of Employment, January 1984)

Two proposals within this white paper were of special interest to those concerned with training and retraining for adults; both of which were heavily criticised. The first was the decision to transfer the funding for one quarter of vocationally-based non advanced further education (NAFE) from local authorities to the Manpower Services Commission. Their aim was to make training and vocational education more relevant to employment needs (this is discussed in detail in chapter 4). The second was the proposed changes to the MSC's existing provision for adults.

Criticism came out more strongly in response to the Government's White Paper than the MSC proposals published at the end of 1983. Perhaps because the White Paper made it clear that the new strategy was to operate within existing resources. There was no commitment to additional funding on the part of government. The £250 million previously allocated mainly to TOPS were to be re-allocated to the new programmes which were expected to throughput twice as many trainees as under TOPS: from 110,000 to 250,000. (McLardy, 1984, p. 3)

According to the MSC proposals, the whole of adult training was to be split into two main categories:

"(a) an industry-focussed programme of job-related training directed to known employment needs and to help the creation and growth of businesses; and

(b) a programme specifically to help unemployed people to improve their basic skills, retain employability, and cope with the changing content of jobs and pattern of work." (Manpower Services Commission, 1983(c), p. 10)

The industry-focused programme designed to encourage training more closely directed towards the skills employers were believed to need, was to be mainly through grants to employers, Open Tech and training packages, training for self-employment and direct

training services, which would replace large parts of the existing TOPS programme. The remainder of the TOPS and pre-TOPS courses were to reappear as a programme specially designed for the unemployed to build foundation skills and improve and retain employability. However, these work preparation courses were to become part-time courses with fees-only provision as opposed to full-time courses paying a training allowance. (Jones, November 1984, pp. 22-23)¹³

The White Paper also made it clear that more resources were to be allocated to job-related training than to training for the unemployed. McLardy suggests that this would lead to a shift of resources from geographical areas with the greatest social need to those where the need was less great. (McLardy, 1984, p. 41)

In conclusion, there were two broad criticisms advanced of the Adult Training Strategy. The first was that the use of distance learning, the introduction of part-time courses for unemployed adults to replace full-time TOPS courses, and the introduction of student loans were attempts to cheapen training whilst at the same time relieving the level of unemployment as represented by the Department of Employment returns. The second criticism was directed at its predominantly market-led strategy which depended upon the co-operation of employers, despite the fact that the outgoing Chairman Richard O'Brien in 1982 argued in favour of the statutory underpinning of training in preference to a reliance on the free market. (Times Educational Supplement, 15 January, 1982, quoted in McLardy, 1984, p. 29)

THE NEW JOB TRAINING SCHEME - 1987

At the time of the publication of the Adult Training Strategy, and the accompanying White paper the government and the MSC had been criticised for their decision to transfer training funds from the unemployed to those already in employment, and neither paper presented any clearly thought out plan for training unemployed adults in preparation for employment. By 1987 attention began to shift away from youth unemployment, which appeared to be levelling off, towards long term unemployment amongst adults. In an attempt to alleviate the problem the government launched the New Job Training Scheme which was to replace the Job Training Scheme (formerly TOPS for the unemployed), which had operated since 1981 under the New Training Initiative, although the similarities between the two schemes ended with the name.

The new Job Training Scheme was designed to take up to 110,000 people by September 1987 aged principally between eighteen and twenty-five who had been unemployed for over six months. Over a full year 250,000 participants were expected to pass through the scheme. Recruits would be allocated to a Managing Agent who would offer personalised counselling lasting approximately one week and then place the individual with an employer. Employers would pay between four and eight pounds a day towards training costs, the rest would be contributed by the Managing Agent. Managing agents would be given grants by the MSC at the rate of £35 per trainee with an additional £58 for each month of training to cover costs. (Finn, June 1987, p. 1)

Trainees would spend between 3 and 12 months on the scheme and were to be recruited to the programme through "Restart" interviews at local Jobcentres. Attendance at "Restart" interviews was compulsory for the unemployed but acceptance of a place on a scheme was not. However, with few other options open to the unemployed many felt that people would be forced on to the programme. (Ibid., p. 25)

Suspensions were also expressed that the scheme might become compulsory for unemployed adults and comparisons were made between JTS and the American system of Workfare since for the first time participants were not to be paid the "rate for the job" as under the Community Programme but a "training allowance" equal to their benefit entitlement plus a travelling allowance. (Ibid., p. 36.)^{14 & 15}

A document published by the Manpower Services Commission was distinctly evasive on the issue of qualifications. It stated that:

"Wherever possible vocational qualifications will be pursued - although it is important to acknowledge that they will not always be available. . . All participants will receive a Record of Achievement as a result of being on the programme showing the experiences and skills that they have gained." (Manpower Services Commission, n.d., pages unnumbered)

As when the Adult Training Strategy was introduced, there was to be no overall increase in the MSC budget. Instead, it was anticipated that extra resources would be made available from other programmes. This had consequences for colleges of further education and for the skill centres as one informant explained:

"The people who run the skill centres depend quite heavily on money from MSC, particularly through the JTS and we are concerned that because of this transfer of money away from existing MSC adult training programmes on to the new JTS, it is going to mean quite a lot of damage to the skill centre network. We have no formal evidence but we could be talking of only 15 skill centres - there are now 60." (Interview with trade union official: 1 April, 1987)

£7.5 million of the 1987/88 Skillcentre Training Association budget was to be reallocated to the New JTS and £6 million of money which made up the JTS budget was also to be transferred from college-based MSC courses. (NATFHE Journal, April/May, 1987, quoted in Finn, June, 1987, p. 9) The scheme relied very much on the co-operation of employers, and fears of job substitution and displacement and low quality training or none at all were expressed, given the less rigorous approval and monitoring system compared to YTS. (Finn, June, 1987, pp. 14-15)

The schemes critics viewed it principally as a means of reducing the unemployment figures. It would especially reduce the figures for the long-term unemployed since the scheme was specifically aimed at those unemployed for over 6 months; and once the individual completed the training and returned to unemployment he or she would be classed as newly unemployed. (Ibid., p. 38) Participants were to be paid only marginally more than if receiving unemployment benefit or social security, so a reduction in the perceived level of unemployment could be achieved without a massive increase in costs. (Ibid.)

Opposition grew; in particular, from the trade unions. Ron Todd, one of the three TUC Commissioners was reported to be considering resignation over the issue. The TUC pressed for an increase in the money paid to trainees over and above the amount of their benefit, and threatened to boycott the scheme entirely. (Guardian, 21 April, 1987, p. 4)

Finally, under pressure from the trade unions the scheme was eventually dropped. There was an acknowledgement that the new JTS would be unworkable in unionised workplaces in the face of opposition from trade union members. It was not until

February 1988 that the government announced in the white paper, "Training for Employment", that a new scheme would replace the NJTS. In introducing the new scheme they demonstrated that voluntarism was still firmly embedded in the government's 'psyche'. The differences between this new scheme and the NJTS were basically organisational. The New Adult Training Programme (NATP)¹⁶ as it was to be known was intended to subsume all existing MSC adult training programmes. This included the two largest schemes the NJTS and the Community Programme. Approximately 600,000 unemployed entrants a year were expected to be offered places for work experience and training lasting approximately 6 months.

As with the NJTS 40 per cent of time on the scheme would be devoted to "directed training" and trainees would be recruited via the "Restart" interview at local Job Centres. Again trainees were not expected to work towards a vocational qualification, they would instead be awarded a "Record of Achievement upon completion. The planned level of allowance offered only a slight improvement on the previous scheme - participants would receive their benefit plus approximately ten pounds a week. The role of the Managing Agent would instead be taken over by an Approved Training agency, who would perform a similar function, and again would not provide training but refer the participant to an Approved Training Organisation for this purpose. (Jones, March/April, 1988, p. 22) Some time later the scheme began to be referred to as NUTS, the New Unified Training Scheme, and on 5 September 1988 it was being relaunched as Employment Training (ET).¹⁷

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING - 1988

The £1.4 billion Employment Training scheme was described in the "Employment Gazette" as, " Britain's most ambitious training programme ever for unemployed adults." (Employment Gazette, September, 1988, pp. 481-484)

It was expected to provide 600,000 work-based adult training places a year. Like NJTS the programme was to cater mainly for 18 to 24 year old people who had been out of work for between 6 to 12 months and the allowance was to be kept at the same level as under NATP. Again recruitment was to be through the Job Centre Restart interview. The terms "Approved Training Agency" and "Approved Training Organisation" were replaced by "Training Agent" and "Training Manager" respectively, but organisations and individuals acting in these new capacities performed the same functions as under NATP and essentially as under NJTS. Given the similarity of the new programme to the previous New Job Training Scheme and NATP it is not surprising that most of the criticisms of the previous two schemes were applied to Employment Training. (Unemployment Unit, August, 1988, pp. 2-3)

Like the previous schemes, Employment Training was voluntary, but the Secretary of State for Employment still retained powers under the Employment Act of 1988 to designate the scheme "approved training". Perhaps the strongest criticism was that this scheme, purportedly designed to assist people in securing permanent employment, was unlikely to lead to a recognised vocational qualification and was instead a form of working for benefit. Michael Meacher, shadow employment secretary, writing to the Guardian shortly after the launch of the scheme suggested that keeping operating costs down was not the only reason why allowances were to be kept low:

"Why does the Government continue to insist on preventing employers topping up the allowances where they're willing to? It would be a simple change to make ET subject to employment legislation and not the social security regulations which claw back any extra payments the employer might make. Or is it because the Government wants the allowances to be as low as possible so that the pay of low-paid workers doing similar work can be pulled down further still? (Meacher, 17 September, 1988, p. 18)

There were doubts as to whether the scheme could result in real skills training or indeed whether it was designed to do so. Even as the scheme was being launched a confidential document researched by the Management Information and Evaluation Strategy Group within the MSC, which had been renamed the Training Commission in September of 1987, outlining some problems the new scheme was likely to encounter, was leaked to the press. There were doubts expressed as to whether Employment Training would lead to a vocational qualification or a credit towards one, or whether sufficient employers would come forward to offer training places. The Training Commission was also anxious to prevent a repeat of the early high drop out rates under NJTS. (Financial Times, 5 September, 1988, p. 10)

The success of Employment Training was dependent upon the co-operation of two groups, the employers and the trade unions. NJTS had already failed because of a trade union boycott, and before the launch of the new scheme employers were expressing their reservations, especially if their existing employees chose not to co-operate, as this Personnel Director of a large manufacturing company stated to the Financial Times:¹⁸

"Arranging workplacements, providing supervision and training is costly, especially if it does not fit in with your own training plans. If on top of paying £5 a day per trainee, we face opposition from shop stewards, for many companies it simply will not be worth the hassle." (Financial Times, 30 August, 1988, p. 7)

Although the Training Commission expected that labour market pressure would encourage companies to become involved, a report in the Financial Times on August 30 just before the launch of the scheme anticipated some problems:

"The CBI, which supports the scheme, nevertheless notes that many companies do not know enough about the scheme, and say others have reservations. Some CBI members put it more strongly: they are extremely sceptical of the value of the scheme.

"One reason is that employers will be expected to pay 5 pounds a day towards the cost of training. Overall employers will be expected to provide about 150 million pounds a year."¹⁹ (Financial Times, 30 August, 1988, p. 7)

The report went on to argue that the funding arrangement adopted by the Training Commission reflected this anti-training attitude on the part of employers. Rather than a co-operative arrangement it was based on a financial exchange. However, as the Training Commission progressively withdrew from a direct role in funding and organising adult training in order that employers may be forced to bear more of the burden, the fear was expressed that the quality would deteriorate. (Financial Times, 30 August, 1988, p. 7)

In contrast, the co-operation of the trade unions was much more of a political issue rather than of financial expediency. The decision was based on the principle of whether the TUC could continue to be seen to support a scheme which, in essence, they believed to be fraudulent. Ron Todd, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, who had resigned as a member of the Commission early in 1988 partly because of his opposition to ET, stated in a newspaper interview that:

"The unions were being asked to give credibility to a bankrupt scheme that had nothing to do with proper training. . . . The truth is that the Government is looking for a hole to hide half a million unemployed in to remove them from the unemployment count. And I for one will no longer help to dig that hole." (Financial Times, 8 September, 1988, p. 10)

The issue, although superficially simple, was as complex as the resolution which finally emerged.

The Conservative government which first came to power in 1979 made explicit their wish to marginalise the trade unions. Hugo Young of the Guardian draws a colourful picture of Conservative Party strategy:

"There should no longer be any question of trying to "get on with" the unions, The party should make it clear from the start that it would strike at the Labour-union connection.

A propaganda offensive should begin immediately. "Dig every skeleton out of the union cupboard, linking it with Labour, "Stepping Stones"²⁰ counselled. Float as many half-baked ideas for change as you could think of, to make more modest plans seem plausible. And sever relations with the leaders: "For Tories to treat them as responsible figures, and thus give them more credibility, must in the end be a mistake." (Guardian, 13 September, 1988, p. 19.)

On 7 September 1988 at the TUC Annual Conference a vote was passed, with a majority of 369,000, to withdraw support from Employment Training with a selective two-year phase-out of union involvement.²¹ (Financial Times, 7 September, 1988, p. 10) However, support of the boycott was not universal. Several trade union leaders indicated their willingness to co-operate with the new scheme including Gavin Laird of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and Eric Hammond of the EETPU. (Guardian, 16 September, 1988, p. 20)

It was anticipated that a withdrawal of TUC support from Employment Training might lead directly to the removal of the three trade union representatives from the Training Commission.²² In fact, the government went further. It not only cut the TUC out of the Training Commission, it disbanded the Commission entirely. The government appeared to act quickly, although it had been in the process of preparing a new White Paper on training and employment before the TUC decision was reached. It is not clear how

much this was part of a master plan or whether the government merely responded to the situation. Nonetheless two decisions were made which shifted training further into the employers domain. The first was an apparent weakening of the massive Training Commission quango. The Guardian refers to "Mr. Fowler's determination to mastermind what little is left of his own department by fending off the voracious Lord Young", a reference to the rapid growth of the Training Commission from a small agency within the Department of Employment to a massive semi-autonomous organisation. The second was a shift away from tripartism with a greater share of responsibility being given to employers as promised in the 1987 Conservative election manifesto. (Financial Times, 23 September, 1988, p. 19)

Publicly the Employment Secretary, Norman Fowler blamed the trade union boycott for his decision to abolish the Training Commission. It was reported in a newspaper article that he believed ". . . it would be impossible for the TUC's commissioners to take responsibility for an important programme to which the TUC was opposed." (Financial Times, 16 September, 1988, p. 20) His decision to scrap the Training Commission completely was described variously as "vindictive and destructive" by Labour's shadow employment secretary and "right and inevitable", by John Banham, CBI Director-General. The Association of British Chambers of Commerce stated their appreciation of the move. (Ibid.)

By November the trade unions had reached further agreement amongst themselves under which individual unions would participate in the Employment Training Scheme if 5 basic principles were met. The TUC General Council ruled that training should meet the following stipulations:

- (a) trainees were paid the rate for the job

- (b) the training was of a high quality
- (c) trainees were given employee status
- (d) participation should be voluntary
- (e) unions be given an increased role in the schemes. (Guardian, 22 November, 1988, p. 4)

The trade union stand in the controversy over the NJTS and ET was certainly significant, since the outcome of the struggle which ensued signalled the break-up of the existing tripartite consensus and paved the way for a new training partnership between government and business. The role of the trade unions cannot, therefore, be ignored. However, other issues stand out as of major importance as far as this research is concerned. The first is that new partnership between government and business, and the second is the emphasis on training in the workplace. The long-term classroom and workshop based quality skills training which was offered under TOPS all but disappeared from government funded programmes for adults. This was where the further education colleges could excel.

EMPLOYMENT FOR THE 1990s

WHITE PAPER DECEMBER 1988

A new white paper on employment and training had been expected for some time, and, as stated above, it is not clear how far its contents were altered as a result of the TUC boycott of Employment Training. This boycott decision could indeed have smoothed the way for the new arrangements laid out in this white paper. In essence, the new

arrangements kept the former Training Commission firmly within the Department of Employment as a Training Agency and dispersed its powers as well as some of its staff across the country. These staff were to be appointed to individual Training and Enterprise Councils which would be established by business interests.²³

The paper declared that the nation had not been training in sufficient numbers and set out the principles of a new framework for training. In future training was to meet a number of criteria. It should first, "contribute to business success and economic growth", second, be locally based, third, offer qualifications "based on recognised standards of competence"; and finally, it was stressed that "employers and individuals needed to accept a greater share of responsibility for training". The role of government was to be restricted to establishing a framework and funding training for the unemployed. The new partnership between government and business was barely implied, although it was less tacitly expressed in the composition of the National Training Task Force. (Employment, Department of, December 1988, p. 30)

The white paper envisaged training operating at three different levels, national, industry and local. At national level the Training Agency now within the Department of Employment would continue to operate on a day to day basis much as the Training Commission had. Also at national level, a National Training Task Force which would carry out an advisory role would help promote training amongst businessmen and industrialists. Twelve individuals would be appointed to the Task Force, two thirds of whom would be leading figures from industry and commerce. The Chairman would be the existing Chairman of the Training Commission, Mr. Brian Wolfson. (Ibid., p. 32)

The Training Task Force would also be responsible for advising the new Training and Enterprise Councils who would be responsible for co-ordinating training at a local level.

The TECs, modelled closely on the American Private Industry Councils, would be established through existing business organisations like the Chambers of Commerce. A national network of around 100 TECs was expected to take between three to four years to establish; and would be allocated between £15 and £50 million pounds to organise and promote training in their local area. (Ibid., p. 40) The white paper envisaged the TECs taking up the following duties:

"They will examine the local labour market, assessing key skill needs, prospects for expanded job growth and the adequacy of existing training opportunities. They will draw up a plan, containing measurable objectives for securing quality training and enterprise development that meets both Government guarantees and community needs, tailoring national programmes to suit area needs and to achieve agreed performance outcomes. They will manage training programmes for young people, for unemployed people,²⁴ and for adults requiring new knowledge and technical training. They will be responsible for the development and provision of training and other support for small businesses relevant to local needs." (Ibid., p. 40)

The TECs would not run programmes themselves, but would sub-contract to local providers. (Ibid., p. 42)

By encouraging employer involvement in this way the government hoped to ensure that training met local needs and that the responsibility for promoting training in the private sector was placed with the employers:

"By increasing employer responsibility for local training arrangements and enterprise support and development, TECs will ensure that training provision is more relevant to employers' needs and to improve the skill and enterprise of the workforce. By promoting training arrangements that are clearly linked to business success, TECs will generate more private investment in training by developing local enterprise support networks to harness the growing opportunities available in local business markets. TECs will build a more coherent approach to training and enterprise at the local level" (Ibid., p. 43)

Like the Private Industry Councils in the United States, the TECs would consist of an office and a board. The TEC Board would be the decision making body, and the office

will be responsible for carrying out decisions made by the board. Each board would have a minimum of twelve members, two thirds of whom would be drawn from private sector employers, who were local business leaders. The remaining one third would be drawn from local authorities, the voluntary sector or trade unions.²⁵

By early December the TUC's Education and Training Committee had met to decide how it should respond to the White Paper, and the Financial Times reported their opposition to be unlikely, since the Transport and General Workers union had already recommended regional officials to take up seats on TECs. Mr. Ron Todd was reported as stating that accepting a seat on one of the Councils did not conflict with the trade unions opposition to the Employment Training Programme. (Financial Times, 10 December, 1988, p. 5)

As far as the Training Agency was concerned, the existing fifty-eight regional offices of the Training Commission were to be conflated to nine larger regional offices and their function would be to monitor TECs who would in turn monitor the providers. To begin with the TECs would be staffed by Training Agency employees on secondment, but there was a danger that once the Councils are running efficiently they may be replaced with cheaper labour. The Financial Times reported in December of 1988 that there would be no redundancies at the Commission's headquarters at Moorfoot, Sheffield. However, staffing cuts were later announced which were thought to be in the order of four hundred.²⁶ Where TECs were not established the Training Agency would continue to carry out its duties; whilst monitoring the work of the TECs which were already established. The aim, however, was to encourage "systematic self-monitoring by TECs."²⁷

The extremely close linkage between local business interests and the TECs was at their very core; and one the TEC's functions was to disburse large sums of money to local sub-contractors who would be local companies. So although the close link was emphasised, there was a problem in that TECs should also be seen as independent of local business organisations, especially if the government decided on self monitoring for TECs. (Financial Times, 6 December, 1988, p. 23)

Despite the fact that businesses represented on the TECs would not be training providers, a trade union official also expressed some concern at this:

"At least two third of people on the councils will come from private employers. They will be there representing their companies but they are intended to be there representing the great and the good in their locale. . . . So local rivalries that exist between different factions of Chambers of Commerce will in the main sink their differences and all get part of the gravy train. (Interview with trade union official: 23 December 1988)

In December, shortly after the Act was published the Financial Times announced the founding of the first TEC in Birmingham. Twelve local employers were invited to the first meeting but the newspaper reported no trade unionists were involved. There were two other major changes detailed in the Act which are worth mentioning since they are indicative of a general trend towards the privatisation of training. The first concerned the remaining seven Industrial Training Boards who were soon to become independent non-statutory training organisations, fully supported by their industries. The act ruled that they would not have the power to raise levies but would be funded through subscriptions and charges for services. The Act stated that the Boards:

". . . have not succeeded in raising the standard and quantity of training in the sectors they covered to the level of our major competitors overseas. In particular they failed to make any significant impact on the problem of training and retraining for people already in employment." (Employment, Department of, December, 1988, p. 34)

The second major change concerned the sixty skillcentres which operated under the Skills Training Agency and who derived 80 per cent of their income from offering training courses to the unemployed through the Training Commission.²⁸ Two government reports indicated that the Training Commission could have bought this training more cheaply from private providers and therefore the Skills Training Agency must now "compete with other providers in the training market". (Employment, Department of, December 1988, p. 36)

CONCLUSION

Drawing all these strands together, the picture that emerges is one of a process of advance through consensus and co-operation towards state intervention in industrial training followed by an ideological shift in emphasis which seeks to place responsibility for training with the voluntary efforts of employers.

Throughout this chapter reference has been made to the work of Stringer and Richardson and Anderson and Fairley who suggest that, in Britain, policy making decisions at government level have been arrived at through a process of negotiated consent. Stringer and Richardson explain that, given this established process of negotiated consent, the most efficient method by which decisions can be achieved is through the encouragement of 'communities' or 'networks' "which can effectively process issues and problems to the satisfaction of the participants". (Stringer and Richardson, 1982, p. 22)

Up to the present time the 'community' for training issues included several government departments²⁹ and equal representation on official committees of employers and trade unions. These parties have exhibited a broad level of agreement on training policy as part of a general consensus on economic and employment policy. It was not until the 1981 New Training Initiative that political differences of opinion emerged along party lines. (Anderson and Fairley, 1983, p. 193). While there still appears to be broad support for state training policy, it is the detail and the manner in which policy has been executed that give cause for dispute.

Another key feature of this development is that of incrementalism and compromise that does not threaten stability. Stringer and Richardson suggest that even under these circumstances of "negotiated order" there are instances of "apparently radical policy change" dependent upon the peculiar set of circumstances and/or the disposition of the parties to the negotiations. Alternatively it could be argued that any really radical policy change takes place only under circumstances when the negotiated order begins to break down or the network or community is deliberately reformulated to involve new participants. The following suggests that this may have happened.

The first modern example of compromise and of "arms-length" state intervention is the 1964 Act which set up the Industrial Training Boards. It was clear that employers were not training and the Boards were designed to encourage investment in training and to establish a system whereby the costs of training could be born equitably by all employers. The Boards were set up under a tripartite structure with the trade unions and employers involved at industry level. However, the consensus under which the Boards were established was flawed, and dissension from those on the far political right and the small employers pushed the government into introducing change.

The 1973 Act was a further tacit yet incomplete acknowledgement of the failure of voluntarism. The trade unions had long favoured the notion of a central body to co-ordinate training nationally and the establishment of the Manpower Services Commission in 1973 strengthened the influence of the trade unions on training policy. On the Commission and at Area Manpower Board level they had equal representation with employers, albeit in an advisory capacity. The trade unions were also strongly committed to the MSC and its programmes to help the unemployed, and by all accounts this still remains the case. The legislation was however, less radical than it might have been and represented yet another compromise. Although this represented a considerable step in the direction of greater state intervention, government involvement still remained at "arms-length" through the Manpower Service Commission. The Commission was established as a quasi-autonomous body, responsible to the Secretary of State for Employment, yet outside government. This contrived distancing was later to cause problems to which the 1988 Employment and Training Act represented a solution by bringing the Training Commission once more under close control of the Department of Employment. The overall trajectory was towards greater state involvement, especially in training for the young unemployed, yet the policy decisions showed a lack of total commitment to the proposition.

By 1981, the Conservative government, elected on a platform of reduced state intervention in the economy and commitment to challenge the trade unions to free industry from the constraints which were believed to limit expansion, signalled a return to voluntarism in training policy. Since that time, it could be argued that government altered the balance of the consensus which was influential in the formation of training policy. They achieved this in two ways. First, this was done through the privatisation of training, which resulted in the emergence of numerous private training agencies and companies who supply the hardware and training packages to these establishments

and to public educational institutions. Thus the balance of parties with an interest in training policy was skewed towards the private sector. Second, the balance was further skewed in this direction in 1987 when Mrs Thatcher appointed six additional employer representatives to the Commission thus outnumbering the TUC representatives.

Alongside this, policy changes have been introduced in response to which the TUC have felt compelled to take a stand, criticising, if not in total opposition to the thrust of those changes. The TUC have taken a stand on, for example, trainee allowances, the abolition of 16 ITBs in 1981 and the closure of 29 government skill centres in February 1985. Unfortunately the stand in each case, with the exception of TUC opposition to the New Job Training Act, has been ineffective. The full strength of TUC opposition to the NJTS has, in a sense, been impaired, since the government followed the withdrawal of NJTS with the introduction of an almost identical scheme for young unemployed adults. Furthermore the trade unions appeared not to act in concert with one another, and through newspapers and TV, divisions became issues of public interest. Thus the strength of the trade unions relative to employers was deliberately weakened, and gaping fissures appeared in the consensus.

It is argued that this conscious breaking up or altering the balance of vested interests in the network of parties that made up the consensus, enabled more radical policy decisions to be put into effect. Finally the TUC decision to limit co-operation with the new Employment Training Scheme gave the government the opportunity to challenge the custom and practice which had long been the hallmark of decision making in British politics. The abolition of the Training Commission as a quasi-autonomous body signalled a significant reduction in trade union influence on training policy. If the Conservative government once believed they needed trade union co-operation in the workplace to mount programmes for the unemployed, it seems they could now operate

without it. Today "radicalism" refers not to increased state intervention as in the mid-1960s, but greater and greater involvement of the private sector in partnership with government in formulating training policy and to the further exclusion of organised labour.³⁰

Now, not only are employers exhorted to train but they have greater control over resources through the new Training Enterprise Councils. The evidence of history suggests that voluntarism is ineffective. It remains to be seen whether awarding employers greater control over resources at a local level will produce results.

NOTES

¹ See: Adrian Bristow, Inside the College of Further Education, (London: HMSO, 1976) and P. J. C. Perry, The Evolution of British Manpower Policy, (London: Published by the author and distributed by British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education, 1976).

² See: articles in *The Guardian* dated 13 September 1988, p. 19 and 16 September 1988, p. 20.

³ See for example: an article by Lucia Jones in the NATFHE Journal dated March/April 1988.

⁴ The American Impact on Great Britain 1898-1914, quoted in Employment for the 1990s, Cmnd 540, (London: HMSO), p. 28.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hall and Miller explain that:

'These agreements allowed that when no time-served craftsmen were available, 'dilutee' labour might be employed but with the provision that such persons were allowed to tackle only specific jobs and to use only specific machines; details of such employees were to be noted in a 'dilution book'. . . . [After the war] Unions, understandably, complained of the training of 'dilutees' when craftsmen had no work and so the government training centres was reduced and training restricted to ex-servicemen, unemployed and disabled men. This situation persisted until 1963 . . . (Kenneth Hall and Isobel Miller, Retraining and Tradition: The Skilled Worker in an Era of Change, p. 41.)

⁷ These groups included the disabled under the 1944 and 1958 Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts and the Armed Forces ex-regulars under the Ministry of Labour Memorandum to Estimates Committee, 1966-67. (Malcolm Anderson and John Fairley, "The Politics of Industrial Training in the United Kingdom", (1983), p. 194.)

⁸ The relationship between the MSC and the government is interesting, but detailed study of this relationship is not within the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that over the next 10 years, as youth employment reached new heights, the MSC expanded its influence and increased its budget from 250 million for 1975-76 to 2,014

million in 1984-85. The projected budget for 1988 is 2.9 billion. (Tony Gaint, "Living and Learning - the Influence of the MSC in Britain", Training and Development (October 1989).)

⁹ See also: M. Jackson, "A Seat at the Table?", in Challenging the MSC on Jobs, Education and Training: Enquiry into a National Disaster, ed. Caroline Benn and John Fairley, pp. 26-39.

¹⁰ A trade union officer, closely involved with the MSC, talked during interview about an:

" . . . uneasiness within the MSC about government policies on two levels. People in the field actually do not believe in the programmes in quite the way that people outside the MSC think they do. MSC Area Managers and our own Programme Managers are very good at getting schemes off the ground. This is not because they think they are terrific programmes with a high degree of money in them, but because they are good at what they do, i.e. delivering schemes. . . . At senior level within the MSC there is a rather more private view, nevertheless strongly held that training is not a solution to unemployment. You cannot train your way out of unemployment." (Interview: 1 April 1987)

Another trade union official also closely involved with training policy felt that, although senior MSC staff shared a commitment with other staff to provide a training service, their first commitment was nevertheless to the government. (Interview: 23 December 1988)

¹¹ In so doing, the Discussion Paper focused on training that would meet the needs of the economy, rather than "speculative training or training for stock". (Manpower Services Commission, Towards and Adult Training Strategy: A Discussion Paper, April 1983. p. 7.)

¹² Open Tech and the Department of Education and Science's programme Professional Industrial and Commercial Updating (PICKUP) are designed to make training accessible to people in employment by developing learning material which can be used by individuals at a time and place of their own choosing. Open Tech is government sponsored and uses the open learning techniques described above.

¹³ At the time of writing Lucia Jones was Education Officer, Adult and Continuing Education for the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.

¹⁴ For an account of the Workfare system in the USA see: Unemployment Unit, Made in the USA, (London: Unemployment Unit, April 1987).

¹⁵ A trade union official interviewed at the time the new scheme was launched expressed grave doubts about the adequacy of the training under NJTS. He stated that:

"You get the chance to test the whole range of occupations, anything between three and twelve months through work based experience with an employer. It is nowhere near the same level of skills training as twelve months in a skill centre on motor vehicle maintenance or nine months in a college doing a bilingual secretarial course. . . . What sort of nationally recognised formal qualification can you get between three and twelve months with 300 hours off-the-job training. You might be able to pick up a City and Guilds credit. At the moment you can get a City and Guilds certificate for bricklaying, plastering, carpentry and joinery in six months full-time - it would take three years with the off-the-job training under the new JTS. We have serious doubts whether people will be able to get real qualifications." (Interview: 1 April 1987.)

¹⁶ Like the NJTS the NATP had not been designated "approved training" and therefore remained, in principal, voluntary, although the same conditions for recruitment prevailed. On the 10 of February 1988 and on 16 February 1988 the Secretary of State for Employment is on record as stating that he had no plans to make the scheme compulsory. However, he did not offer a guarantee that the scheme would remain voluntary in the future. An article in the NATFHE Journal suggested that the likelihood of the scheme being designated compulsory increased since the passing of the Employment Bill. As the article states, Clause 26 of the Bill gives to the Secretary of State for Employment:

" . . . the power at any time to designate a scheme 'approved training', and thereby precipitate benefit sanctions against anyone refusing a place on such a training scheme. This Secretary of State does not intend to use these powers in relation to NATP. No guarantees, however, are being given about the future." (Ibid., p. 23)

¹⁷ A local Training Commission employee, when asked how he was able to keep abreast of the new developments and rapid changes within the Commission replied jokingly he didn't. "I play rugby, they play football." (Meeting at West Biscop College between local MSC officer and college staff, 24 March, 1987.)

¹⁸ Changes are now taking place in further education colleges which go some way to accommodate the requirements of employers, for example the extension of the college year. However, many of these developments emerged subsequent to the completion of this research and they are not discussed in any detail here.

¹⁹ Just as employers were unsure of the co-operation of the trade unions, a trade union leader expressed concern that employers would provide the quality training that was needed. When asked for his comments on Employment Training a trade union official referred back to the New Training Initiative which sought to place the major responsibility for training with employers:

"It is a question about what is wrong with the New Training Initiative of 1981. The mix of on-and off-the-job training for unemployed people and work experience and all that is a useful concept but the possibilities of misuse are so bloody apparent. You do not need a Ph.D. in philosophy to appreciate that it can be and will be misused by employers. . . . Clearly you need employers to provide on-the-job training but that is not what the New Training Initiative is talking about. At the time they said the responsibility for training must lie with the employers as it is only in this way we can ensure that training meets industry's real needs. That implies that employers are a collective who sit down and rationally work out what they need. Which does not bear relationship to the market. Most employers do not provide training. Good firms train and bad firms poach."
(Interview with trade union official 23 December, 1988.)

²⁰ "Stepping Stones": A secret paper prepared at the request of Mrs Thatcher outlining the Conservative Government's proposed approach to trade unions. Written in 1977 by John Hoskyns. He later became policy adviser to the Prime Minister.

²¹ Neither the TUC General Secretary, Normal Willis nor the leader of the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock were in support of the boycott and both urged delegates to the conference to oppose it. Speaking to the TUC on the day prior to the vote Neil Kinnock explored the options:

"The question that must be addressed by this movement - and it is the classic question of trade unionism - is this: do you achieve those ends best from the outside or from the inside?"

He went on to describe the consequences of "staying outside":

"First, the main impediment to Workfare will be removed. Second, the main block to further privatisation of training will be gone. Third, none of the deficiencies and weaknesses of Employment Training will be the fault of the trade union movement, but you will get the blame. You will be the excuse for everything wrong."
(Guardian, 7 September, 1988, p. 4)

²² The three trade union representatives on the Training Commission were Mr. Roy Grantham, leader of the white collar union APEX, Mr. Garfield Davies, of the shopworkers' union, USDAW and Mr. Roy Jackson, TUC Assistant General Secretary.

²³ This white paper was about employment as well as training and began with reference to technological change, global competition, and changing skill and employment requirements. It continued with a review of demographic changes

projected into the 1990s which were expected to shape employment and training policy. Basically the number of people of working age was expected to remain broadly stable (just over 34 million) into the 1990s but the composition of the workforce was expected to change. The numbers of people aged between 16-19 in the population was expected to decrease by over one million between 1983 and 1993, whilst the elderly as a proportion of the population was expected to continue to increase. The paper anticipated therefore that demand for labour would result in an increase in the percentage of women, ethnic minorities and elderly in the workforce.

²⁴ Including the new Employment Training Scheme.

²⁵ Private Sources (1), p14

²⁶ The staffing cuts were not the direct result of establishing the TECs but were a consequence of reorganisation at the Training Agency, as a trade union official explained:

"This is not news or a surprise. It is a development which flows from something called approved training organisation status for training managers. Under a system of self-monitoring you have less staff from the MSC doing monitoring. So you have a high executive officer who personally performs the role of auditor, but not necessarily a money audit. It is an audit of the training manager. That is part of the development philosophy of training that you have less training managers dealing with bigger schemes in terms of number of placements. Because therefore given ATO status they need less day to day monitoring, more book monitoring so you need a more higher level of staff. This is not a new development." (Interview with trade union official 23 December, 1988.)

²⁷ Private Sources (1), p33

²⁸ The Skills Training Agency controlled a network of sixty skillcentres and, before the 1988 Act, operated as a semi-independent training business within the MSC, although it originally formed part of a division of the MSC.

²⁹ These include The Departments of Employment, Education, Environment, Industry and Health and Social Security. In addition the Training Agency, formerly the Manpower Services Commission occupying a semi-autonomous position relative to government. The Training Agency now, however, operates within the Department of Employment.

³⁰ "Radicalism" is a word of ambiguity which has commonly been used to described certain activities of those on the left of the political spectrum. However, in recent years it has been appropriated by those on the political right.

P A R T T W O

**F U R T H E R
E D U C A T I O N**

CHAPTER 3

FURTHER EDUCATION ITS HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

As the previous chapter recalls, training policy developed hesitantly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, despite reports that Britain's labour force was inadequately trained to compete with the growing strength and economic power of Germany and the United States. That hesitancy may be interpreted as a reticence on the part of industry and some politicians towards state intervention. With regard to education generally, however, state intervention was accepted as necessary; and around this time the foundations of the state education system were laid. There is an ambiguity here in that employers welcomed state intervention for basic education at primary and secondary level, but apparently not for training. Nevertheless, then, as now, it is not altogether clear how employers would have responded to comprehensive state

intervention in training and retraining, if that intervention visibly solved training and retraining problems.

This is one example of the irresolvable tension which exists between intervention and voluntarism in British manpower policy. That tension is seen within the further education system and support for training within the companies themselves. In the 1980s voluntarism was touted as the solution to the country's training problems, but commitment was only partial. For instance, history has demonstrated that employers in general are reluctant to invest money in training unless the benefits can be reaped in the short-term; the government has acknowledged its role in organising training for the unemployed; and the further education system remains public, yet inadequately meets the needs of industry. The tension may be expressed in another way, as being between an ideological antipathy towards state intervention and collective action to remedy a national problem.

Chapter 2 illustrated how this tension between voluntarism and intervention was expressed in national training and retraining policy and this Chapter and Chapter 6 show how it is reflected institutionally in further education and industry respectively.

Chapter 3 is a chronology of major events, and legislative and policy change with an emphasis on the role of government policy in shaping further education to render it more responsive to the needs of industry. Four fundamental issues emerge from this chronology, and these are crucial to defining the condition of further education as it is today. These issues are also themes which are pursued in the course of this chapter.

The first issue is that, historically, education and training provision for adults has taken second place to that for young people, particularly young males. Since the 1983 White

Paper, 'Training for Jobs', and the introduction of the Adult Training Strategy, followed by the ill-fated New Job Training Scheme and the very recently introduced Employment Training Programme, the emphasis has shifted slightly. Skills retraining for adults, however, remains a relatively small part of overall further education provision, and it is doubtful whether this will increase in the foreseeable future. This chapter focuses on training and retraining for adults, but examines provision for the student population generally where this throws light on the character and relative size of adult provision.

Second, and more significant in the context of the following chapters, is the fact that further education colleges have a long history of attempting to interpret and respond to legislative change in a way that ensures their own survival. As a consequence colleges have sometimes operated in a climate of uncertainty, unable to plan for the long-term. With the Training Agency, formerly the Manpower Services Commission, and private sources of funding, course approval has been given on a course by course basis. This has the consequence that financial support may be withdrawn at very short notice.

Third, colleges have been forced to compete on a free-market basis with other providers. Colleges have competed with private training agencies and large industrial concerns for training agency status under the two-year YTS and have been successful; although the Training Agency and the government have displayed a marked preference for private sector providers. (Interview with administrator: 7 July 1987) This is an issue which becomes more important in the 1980s with increased state intervention.

Finally, and this is speculative, the colleges may find themselves in an even more difficult and less tenable position in view of the gradual privatisation of training and educational provision which is taking place. In addition to expansion in the number of

private training organisations which has already occurred, the new City Technology Colleges financed through contributions from industry have been established; Training and Enterprise Councils to run the Training Agency's adult programmes at local level have been developed; and finally there is the impending privatisation of the Skill Centres. Thus, 'hemmed-in', the colleges may find themselves facing a situation to which they find it impossible to respond in an effective manner.

It is not intended to present a comprehensive history of further education, but rather a selective account which covers major themes. These themes represent formative events in the development of this sector of education. As in Chapter 2, the primary focus is on the last 15 years. During this period there have been radical changes within further education in response to both national and local government policy change. While there was virtually no adult job retraining in further education prior to this time, an understanding of the policies and debates concerning "technical education", characteristic of the late 19th and first half of the 20th century, may provide an understanding of the dilemmas which bedevil further education today. The review of the earlier period is presented in a briefer form, and begins with the formation of the Mechanics Institutes in the early 1800s.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MECHANICS INSTITUTES

(1800 TO 1850)

Technical or vocational education has its roots in the mediaeval guilds and the Mechanics Institutes of the early 1800s. However, there is some problem in tracing the early history of technical or vocational education in England since as Bristow points out, the early history:

" . . . is such a mixture of technical, adult, elementary and scientific, constantly overlapping and with no fixed boundaries, the threads tangled, and the pattern confused." (Bristow, 1976, pp. 129-130)

Bristow takes as his baseline for tracing the development of technical education, the Mechanics Institutes and institutions like the Warrington Academy, founded in 1796 and Anderson's Institution. He describes how George Birkbeck taught at Anderson's Institute and moved to London in 1823, where he founded the Mechanics Institution. This eventually became Birkbeck College. By 1850 there were more than 600 Mechanics Institutes in cities like Manchester, Bradford, Birmingham and Sheffield with a membership of over half a million. (Bristow, 1976, p. 130)

The Mechanics Institutes may not, however, have been the centres of working class endeavour which is often implied. Shapin and Barnes offer an alternative view of the Mechanics Institutes, which suggests that, far from being a liberating form of self-help, they were indeed a means of social control. The curriculum, principally physics, chemistry, mathematics and earth and life sciences, was designed to be scientific, 'pure' rather than 'applied', factual rather than theoretical or speculative and 'simplified' in presentation. (Shapin and Barnes, 1976, p. 58) According to Shapin and Barnes, the

founders of the Mechanics Institutes had a specific occupational sub-category in mind, that is the mechanic, skilled operative or artisan. Technical and scientific education, it was hoped, would result in their moral improvement. Hence, the outcome would be both uplifting and controlling. (Shapin and Barnes, 1976, pp. 55-56)

Bristow also observes that the curriculum content was not responsive to the needs and abilities of the working people of that time:

"The work of the Mechanics Institutes, however, was hampered from the start by a lack of basic education among its members. This was one of the vital flaws that led to the movement withering away. Another was that the original programmes, with their preoccupation with science, were a little too ambitious Thus they rapidly lost contact with their primary audience and most institutes subsided into middle class organisations offering lectures of general scientific and literary interest." (Bristow, 1976, p. 7)

By 1875 the Mechanics Institutes had reached their peak of activity and many were later taken over by newly empowered local authorities after 1889 as technical institutes. (Stephens and Roderick, 1981, p. 50)

The tendency for the curriculum of the Mechanics Institutes to avoid the applied element in scientific study makes it difficult to categorise them as training institutions. The evidence suggests that the method of exposition was mainly lecture and discussion. Skills in the traditional sense were not taught as such. (Perry, 1976; Shapin and Barnes, 1976; Stephens and Roderick, 1981) The Mechanics Institutes were an example of voluntary endeavour which failed to identify the particular needs of employers and consequently offered a type of education which was inappropriate to the needs of employers and the vast majority of working people.

Throughout this period, whilst the Mechanics Institutes flourished, there remained a reluctance on the part of central government (Perry, 1976) to engage in manpower planning on a national scale. Most industrialists also saw little reason to support scientific and technical education. Since theory could not be taught in the factory they believed it to be the responsibility of others. They were prepared to provide only workshop training. (Stephens and Roderick, 1981, p. 19)

A THREAT TO INDUSTRIAL SUPREMACY AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEED FOR CENTRALISED MANPOWER PLANNING (1850 TO 1944)

Interest in state intervention remained virtually dormant until the mid-19th century, when The Great Exhibition of 1851 focused attention on the threat posed to Britain's industrial supremacy by Germany and the United States. A relative flurry of activity resulted in the expansion of technical education, mostly evening based. The Royal Society of Arts¹ began organising examinations in technical subjects and the City and Guilds of London Institute was founded in 1878. This is probably the first time the link between education and the needs of industry was emphasised and followed up with positive action. (Bristow, 1976, pp. 132-133; Perry, 1976, p. 28-29)

In 1882 Quintin Hogg established The Polytechnic in Regent Street, London (now the Polytechnic of Central London) offering a range of courses wider than the Mechanics Institutes to serve the needs of the working class. A further eleven polytechnics were

established in the London area alone with finance from private supporters, charitable funds and increasingly public money. Then in 1889, following the Paris exhibition of 1867, which again showed Britain to be lagging behind its industrial rivals, the Technical Instruction Act empowered County and Borough Councils to levy rates in order to establish technical schools. This act is significant in that it was the first time further education was defined as a local rather than a national responsibility. (Bristow, 1976, p. 134)

There are two points of interest worth raising in connection with the technical schools. First, enrolment was accepted at any age for evening classes initially. Then later, day and block release and sandwich courses were offered. Second, these institutions were of particular importance to the working class adult since there was no systematic in-company training at the time. The evidence, however, suggests that day release courses were designed for apprentices and that an adult could not expect to be released from work to attend college. (Bristow, 1976; Perry, 1976; Robertson, 1974; Stephens and Roderick, 1981)

The hand of the local authorities was further strengthened by the 1902 Education Act which set up local education authorities. Under the act the local authorities were to take responsibility for higher and technical education, and this was followed by an expansion of evening continuation schools. (Bristow, 1976, p. 135)

By the end of the 1914-18 War far reaching education reforms had been introduced but vocational training was left very much to its own devices. Gradually government attitudes towards centralised manpower planning began to shift, and the following reports, committees and white papers appeared:

Balfour Committee 1924-29

Malcolm Committee 1925-28

Percy Report 1945

Barlow Report

Weeks Report 1950

White Paper on Technical Education 1956

These papers examined skilled manpower shortages and the relationship between education and industry. The link between education and the needs of industry was further emphasised and it was proposed that training places be extended to meet the needs of industry. (Perry, 1976, p. 30)

THE 1944 EDUCATION ACT

By the end of the Second World War there was a growing acceptance of state intervention, but still little training or retraining provision in colleges designed specifically for adults. Provision was directed mainly at young people, although the wording of the 1944 Education Act referred very broadly to those beyond school leaving age as the client group for further education. In fact the 1944 Act was generally very broad in its statements about further education. Under Section 41 of the Butler Education Act a statutory duty was placed on LEAs for the first time: "to secure the provision in their area of adequate facilities for further education, that is to say, full-time and part-time education for persons over compulsory school age". (Bristow, 1976, p. 34)

This lack of definitive detail resulted in variation in interpretation and implementation of the Act as Farmer points out. Indeed, local authorities have generally made a distinction between provision for 16-19s in secondary schools and that made in further education. (Farmer, 1982(b), p. 18) In other words, some LEAs have exercised discretion in providing further education. Although the Warnock Report brought this to public attention as it relates to 16 to 19 year olds, it made no mention of provision for part-time or older students. (Ibid., pp. 18-19)

Section 42 of the Education Act, 1944 also requested schemes in which the local authorities detailed their intentions in relation to further education provision in their area to be submitted for approval by the Secretary of State by 31 March 1948. However, over the years the updating of such schemes has largely been ignored by both the DES and local education authorities and up until the mid 1980s the DES has exercised control over FE mainly through either course approvals or approving capital building programmes. Finally in 1981 the government set up a working party composed of DES officers and representatives of the local authorities to look at the legal position of further education as it related to the 1944 Act, and it recommended that these two requirements of the Act be dropped. (Ibid., p. 19)

In the words of Cantor and Roberts, because of the manner in which some local authorities chose to interpret the Act, much existing further education provision is technically 'ultra vires', and:

"... these questions have been brought into sharp focus by the cuts in provision forced upon local authorities by financial stringency."
(Cantor and Roberts, 1983, p. 13)

Finally, the Education Reform Act of 1988 set the legal status of FE on a firmer footing and redefined clearly the duties of local authorities to secure the provision of further education in their areas. (Education and Science, Department of, 1988)

FROM OPTIMISM AND EXPANSION TO CUTBACKS AND RETRENCHMENT (1950 TO 1979)

From the Butler Education Act onwards arguments relating to further education took up the anxieties first expressed in the mid 19th century and revolved around the fit between education/training and the needs of industry. The period was marked by government legislation designed to make education more responsive to industry and rhetoric aimed at encouraging industry to invest time and money in retraining their employees.²

The 50s and 60s were a time of optimism and expansion, even for further education. Prior to the 1944 Act in 1937/1938 there were only 20,000 full-time and 89,000 part-time students in further education. By 1955 there were ten times as many day release students and the number of full-time students had more than trebled. (Bristow, 1976, p. 139) However, the expansion in enrolments put a heavy strain on resources:

"There were few colleges which did not have a variety of 'annexes', church halls, huts, old schools, even warehouses and crypts were pressed into service in an effort to cope with the demand." (Farmer, 1982(a), p. 58)

Such annexes remained the hallmark of further education colleges, even today.

Despite the expansion of provision and the publication of the White paper "Better Opportunities in Technical Education" in 1961, (Education and Science, Department of, 1961) FE remained the "Cinderella" of the education system. Writing in an FEU Occasional Paper, David Parkes, describes how in the two decades since the 1961 paper, training initiatives were taken out of the ambit of further education with the establishment of the Training Boards post 1964 and the MSC in the 1970s. (Parkes, 1982)

Added to this, the two decades after 1957 witnessed a series of changes which altered the structure of further education, leaving the colleges of further education at the bottom of the ladder in terms of funding priorities. Some colleges, therefore, looked to alternative sources of funding to local government coffers.

In 1957 the government redesignated some of the larger technical colleges CATS (Colleges of Advanced Technology), which subsequently became technological universities, thus leaving the fold of public sector higher education. Then in 1966 the White Paper "A Plan for Polytechnics and other Colleges: Higher Education in the Further Education System" (Education and Science, Department of, 1966) selected 70 major colleges of technology, art and commerce to form 30 polytechnics, geographically placed to serve the whole country. Polytechnics which, until recently, remained under the aegis of the local authorities, were to offer full-time higher education courses leading to degrees validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Finally in 1973 the last major reorganisation came with the cut back in the number of teacher training places available, in anticipation of falling rolls and a number

of teacher training colleges were amalgamated with further education colleges to form new colleges of higher education. This left behind only the colleges of further education which provided lower level provision. Each of these legislative changes meant that further education colleges needed to adapt and alter their provision. (Cantor and Roberts, 1983; Bristow, 1976)

As indicated in Chapter 2, the MSC had figured significantly in these developments. For colleges, situated in areas of high unemployment, MSC funded initiatives seemed to offer jobs and resources to a sector in which both were in decline. Colleges involved themselves in YTS work either as managing agents or providing off-the-job training for other managing agents, although not all local authorities encouraged their colleges to look to alternative sources of funding like the MSC. Many colleges and local authorities were reluctant because of what Chris Farmer calls the uncertainty of this short term funding. (Farmer, 1982(a), p. 59). In the mid-1970s many colleges also involved themselves in training and retraining courses for adults under the MSC-sponsored Training Opportunities Programme (TOPS). Although the subject of criticism at first, this programme came to be recognised as offering quality training for adults.

By the mid-70s, optimism was fading; there was retrenchment and financial constraint. In an attempt to explain these developments, Cantor and Roberts look back over the period and identify two main factors:

" . . . the economic recession resulting in large part from the oil crisis following the 1973 Middle East war and the sharply declining birth rate of the late 1960s and early 1970s." (Ibid., p. 86)

Parkes describes how, especially in the 70s, further education colleges operated within a "complex environment". According to Parkes the further education system found itself:

" . . . caught by resource and developmental constraints, with unreliable or inadequate manpower and forward planning. The

resource constraints expressed themselves through the decade in terms of staffing norms which, attempted to maximise lecturer class contact and class size and minimise class contact [teaching hours] have had negative impacts on manoeuvrability for new teaching methods." (Parkes, 1982, p. 88)

Once again, further education along with higher education and the schools became the butt of criticism. Britain's place in international competition was declining and the finger was pointed at education's inability to turn out a well trained and adequately educated workforce. Labour Prime Minister Callaghan, in his controversial Ruskin speech in 1976 declared that:

"...insufficient emphasis has been placed upon science in schools and upon applied technological subjects. In addition, he advocated a closer correspondence between educational objectives and the nation's manpower requirements." (Cantor and Roberts, 1983, p. 3)

With the early optimism thus fading further education was faced with criticism for apparently failing to meet its allotted task on one side and financial constraint and retrenchment on the other. Further education colleges were not strangers to restraint. It could be argued that many of the financial problems which the colleges faced had their roots in the 1944 legislation, which failed to set out clearly local authority responsibilities for the resourcing of further education. The role which local authorities played in the financing and government of further education colleges is set out in the next section.

FURTHER EDUCATION IN THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES

FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT

The term further education is commonly used to refer to public sector post-school education, that is, polytechnics, colleges of higher education, colleges of further education and the Adult Education Service. Polytechnics, of which there are thirty, no longer come within the ambit of local government. This particular chapter deals specifically with colleges of further education.

Superimposed upon the above model is the division between non-advanced further education (NAFE) which encompasses courses up to and including GCE 'A' level and vocational equivalents, and advanced further education (AFE) which covers full or part-time higher diploma, degree or degree-level equivalent courses. Around 80 per cent of further education provision is at non-advanced level. In 1986 there were over 500 further and higher education establishments in the United Kingdom which came under the auspices of the local authority system; there were 2.3 million students enrolled in public sector further and higher education establishments (including polytechnics) in England and Wales. (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 24)

Provision within further education colleges can be divided as follows: First there are the courses at craft and technician level which have long constituted the main established vocational structure within FE. Qualifications at this level are awarded by City and Guilds of London Institute, the Business and Technician Education Council and the Royal Society of Arts examining bodies. Second is the newer pre-vocational structure, including YTS and the full-time Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE). CPVE offers more generalised education and training courses for young people who

have not yet developed clearly defined educational goals. Third are shorter courses specifically designed to meet the needs of individual employers. Fourth are courses and examinations based on the GCE O and A level courses, also offered in schools, now reorganised under GCSE. These courses are followed by students seeking entry into higher education. Fifth are the non-vocational and leisure courses; and finally degree and diploma level courses are available, but these have mainly been provided by Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education. (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 24)

As stated earlier, the legal basis of further education has, until recently, been provided by the 1944 Education Act, and as Gleason and Mardle point out, the central framework of policy has altered little since the original act was placed on the statute books, that is, until the 1988 Education Reform Act. It should be noted, however, that the 1988 Act was not in force at the time of this study and the conditions described here are those which existed prior to the passing of the Act. (Gleason and Mardle, 1980, p. 48)

As with schools the system was national, but locally and regionally administered. The Department of Education and Science has overall responsibility but the whole system was highly devolved. Central government was responsible for legislation and approved changes in the main structure, whilst the 105 local authorities were in control of the planning and development of schools and colleges within their authority. They were also the employing authority for teachers and administrative staff. (Cantor and Roberts, 1983, pp. 12-24) There were advantages and disadvantages to this system which, from the point of view of David Parkes:

" . . . trades a certain amount of political stability for an enormous lack of co-ordination". (Parkes, 1982, p. 88)

Although situated within the local authority structure, the further education sector is administered separately from the schools. This, as Cantor and Roberts explain was probably a consequence of the relatively smaller number of such institutions compared to schools and the fact that public interest was, as might be expected, more generally directed at the schools. (Cantor and Roberts, 1983, p. 26)

A college's involvement in deciding how its budget should be allocated varied from local authority to local authority. The local authorities had greater potential power over how the college's budget was allocated than central government had over the rate support grant. Generally, the more advanced level work the college undertook the more autonomy it had over its budget, because funding for advanced level work is allocated differently. Deloitte Haskins and Sells point out that the college's financial autonomy was considerably more proscribed than its academic autonomy. (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 26)

In addition to administration at national level through the DES and local level through the LEAs the FE sector was administered at regional level through the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) whose remit was to advise and co-ordinate further education provision in their region. They were originally formed in 1947-48 by the local education authorities and were financed by them. Several other official bodies and organisations had some influence on, and some input into, further education. These include the Department of Employment through the Training Agency and various business and industrial organisations and trade unions as well as validating and/or examining bodies. For the further education colleges this meant principally the Technician and Business Education Councils (BTEC) and the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI). (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells 1987, p. 26)

Within the institutions themselves general policy and direction were the responsibility of the Governing Body which worked closely with the principal. In addition there was the Academic Board which may have had varying responsibility ranging from executive powers over planning and academic work to operating only in an advisory capacity to the principal and Board of Governors. Finally, the local authority retained the power to approve financial estimates. (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 25)

Further Education Colleges were financed from four main sources: through central government in the form of the Block Grant or Rate Support Grant (RSG) for the provision of Non-Advanced Further Education, and from the "capped" AFE pool. This was paid annually to local authorities and the major part of it, the block grant, was unassigned. (Ibid.) The Rate Support Grant expanded throughout the 1950's and 1960's and consolidated itself between 1968 and 1974 and has gone into decline since. (Interview with college administrator: 7 July 1987)

The remainder of income was made up from local rates money which was directed through the local authorities from the Department of Education and Science under Educational Support Grants and finally money from self-support courses. The income from self-support courses, generally those funded through the Training Agency, was relatively small, although as a percentage of total funding it has grown considerably in recent years. (Ibid.) Some local education authorities allowed colleges to retain all the monies they generated externally. Others, like for example the local authority for West Biscop College, the subject of this study, required that 10 per cent of this earned income be passed on to them, as this extract from a consultative paper prepared by the local authority illustrates:

"Notwithstanding the arrangements described above, it is the policy of the . . . council to encourage colleges to market their facilities vigorously and seek to meet the needs of the local community in whatever way they can. Insofar as this leads to additional provision which is operated

on a self-financing basis, no restriction whatsoever is placed on colleges as to what they may offer. Colleges will be required to contribute 10% of income so generated to the . . . Council in part recognition of central services provided by the . . . Council." (Private Sources)

The decision by central government in 1985 to transfer 25 per cent of NAFE funding included in the RSG to the Training Agency has obviously altered the balance of RSG versus other sources of funding. Beyond this, it is difficult to make generalised and accurate statements about further education colleges because as Gleason and Mardle point out:

". . . at the institutional level, one FE college is not necessarily like any other; its students, staff, curricula, administration, finance and so forth are dependent upon a variety of regional factors, not least of all those of local industry and employment." (Gleason and Mardle, 1980, p. 9)

This decision regarding 25 per cent of NAFE funding was a major controversial issue for the further education colleges in the mid-1980s. However, it was only one of many problems facing the FE sector throughout the decade.

FURTHER EDUCATION IN THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES

SCRUTINY, CRITICISM AND UNCERTAINTY

In the 1980s further education faced scrutiny, criticism, and uncertainty. It experienced state intervention on a scale hitherto unknown, and uncertainty about the future manifested itself in the defensive stance taken by the normally conservative further education teachers' union, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE). It was clear that local authorities, as well as the teaching

profession, were concerned about the changes that were taking place but felt powerless to alter the course of events to any considerable degree. It seemed to be a case of negotiating small gains wherever possible. Staff at West Biscop College, where my research took place, expressed this sense of worry and unease in their conversations and in their actions. This was also reflected in the way courses were organised and operated. On a psychological level the staff found the changes unsettling and threatening and yet the terms and conditions of their employment demanded at least a partial degree of compliance and co-operation.

In January 1984, there began a series of events, orchestrated directly or indirectly by the present government, which aggravated this feeling of unease and insecurity. The first was the government's White paper 'Training for Jobs' (Employment, Department of, 1984), which ushered in the Adult Training Strategy and proposed the transfer of 25 per cent of non-advanced further education (NAFE) (excluding exclusively 'O' and 'A' level examination work in non-technical subjects or traditional adult education classes) funding from the local authorities to the Manpower Services Commission. The balance was to be achieved by cutting £611 million from the rate support grant which is normally paid direct to the local authorities. The authorities were aware, however, that non co-operation might result in the loss of Rate Support Grant and the MSC going to private sector training organisations for off-the-job training. (Times Educational Supplement, 7 September, 1984, p. 1)

This transfer of funding was deemed necessary by the government to satisfy the aims and objectives of the White Paper. The government felt that public sector provision for training and vocational education was insufficiently responsive to employment needs both locally and nationally. Prior to this £1.2 billion per annum was spent on non-advanced further education in England and Wales and £800 million of that was

allocated specifically to work-related provision. (NATFHE Newsletter, March/April, 1986). In making this statement about the responsiveness of training and vocational education, the government were merely reiterating the concerns of 130 years ago. These concerns and criticisms have dogged the vocational education system since that time.

The issue of the transfer of NAFE funding occupied the pages of the educational press for several months. In September 1984 the Times Educational Supplement reported on the speech by the Shadow Training Minister, Barry Sheerman in his Huddersfield East constituency. He referred to the proposal as: "a piece of legislative thuggery that may well sound the death knell of tripartism". He said it was "thin and badly thought out", and that the proposals were:

". . . based on false premises about what is wrong with non-advanced further education, and false promises about the ability of the MSC to put things right It would not be the first time the Thatcher government has ridden roughshod over the advice and better judgement of the MSC. But it would be unprecedented for it to resort to its legal powers to do so." (Times Educational Supplement, 14 September, 1984, p. 20)

The controversy over the issue dragged on for almost a year until September 1984, when, despite reservations reportedly expressed by MSC officials, the then Employment Secretary, Tom King formally instructed the MSC to implement the proposals contained in the White Paper. A final and more satisfactory deal was worked out between the authorities and the new and more pragmatic and conciliatory MSC Chairman Bryan Nicholson. He had replaced David Young; and with Nicholson the colleges were able to retain control over their own curriculum through the submission of negotiated three year development plans. (Times Educational Supplement, 26 April, 1985, p. 15; 14 June, 1985, p. 17; 19th July, 1985, p. 12)

The settlement was a compromise, but the colleges were left wounded. An article in the NATFHE Journal summarising the events of the autumn of 1985 stated that:

"The Government's identification of 'work-related NAFE' as a problem area has been amply refuted by a substantial body of published evidence since the White Paper was published (see for example, 'Responsibility and Responsiveness', produced by the AMA and Coombe Lodge). Many key Ministers have backtracked from their original assertions, effectively admitting their own ignorance of the realities of FE. Also the Government have simply ignored their critics' argument that shuffling the same amount of money around - and siphoning some off into additional administrative overheads - can do nothing to meet the needs of an already hard-pressed system." (NATFHE Journal, October 1985(b), p. 25)

Jack Grassby, then NATFHE National Executive Council representative, writing in the NATFHE Journal in response to the White Paper "Training for Jobs", used the opportunity to accuse the MSC of being "an instrument of cheap labour, of dividing academic and vocational education" and of posing "a most serious threat to democratic control". (Grasby, December 1985, p. 36)

His concerns may not have been totally substantiated. Nevertheless, fears were expressed by those in responsible positions closely involved in post-compulsory education at Inspectorate level that:

"Although the MSC only finance 25% they effectively control 100%, as they have bought into all areas of NAFE provision. Furthermore . . . although the local Area Manpower Board have accepted the entire LEA offering to date . . . it must be only a matter of time until the MSC officials familiarise themselves with the FE system before changes will be mooted." (Merricks, 1987, p. 40)

In this same year "Competence and Competition," a report produced by the Institute of Manpower Studies for the National Economic Development Council and the MSC, highlighted the deficiencies in Britain's post-school education and training system by comparison with the United States, Germany and Japan.

Then, in June of 1985, the Audit Commission Report 'On Obtaining Better Value from Further Education' was published. This was not well received by the FE teachers union, and was reportedly replete with errors. Peter Dawson, then NATFHE General Secretary, writing in the NATFHE Journal describes the Report as:

"... a pathetically inadequate Audit Commission analysis of the 'savings' to be made in FE published in the face of lengthy and detailed criticism by FE practitioners explaining the errors - some of them howlers. . . ." (NATFHE Journal, October, 1985(a), p. 23)

Finally in July the MSC officially announced its intention to introduce the new two-year YTS, with effect from April 1986. This involved colleges in rethinking their courses and reorganising the administration of these courses.

At the end of 1985, Peter Dawson expressed the view that:

"We are now emerging from the 'phoney war', in which FE's alleged shortcomings have been viewed from every angle and a wide variety of - often conflicting - solutions have been proposed. . . . FE faces actual change in respect of its organisation, funding, curricula, and relations with other sectors of education and training. These changes will be far-reaching. . . ." (ibid.)

There was, however, more change to come. In 1988 Kenneth Baker, then Minister for Education, introduced his Education Reform Bill. (Education and Science, Department of, 1988) The same principles of devolution of power which were first developed for schools were also to apply to further education colleges and this meant greater power for governing bodies, whose constitutions were to be radically altered to give greater representation to business interests. (Deloitte Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 27)

The Bill was unpopular with the FE teachers union who, whilst accepting that FE colleges need greater autonomy from local authorities on a day to day basis, were afraid that:

" . . . the Act will shift control of a key community service too far and too fast from LEAs to colleges." (NATFHE Journal, March/April, 1988, p. 20)

and equally important, the Act increased

" . . . central government control and business influence in education, and [was] part of general attacks on local government jobs and services." (NATFHE Journal, Summer 1988, p. 25)

NATFHE was also concerned that priorities were shifting towards more market oriented goals, to the exclusion of other important issues. (Ibid. p. 26)

Under the new Act, college governors were empowered to carry out many of the functions which were previously the responsibility of the local authority, and their duties included deciding the general direction of the college and:

" . . . determining the education and training provision to be made by the college in the light of the target enrolments in different areas of work as set by the . . . Council;" (Private sources)

They would also be responsible for determining how expenditure should be divided between various categories up to the balance allocated by the local authority, including maintaining the college premises in a fit state of repair. Finally the governing body would be responsible for determining staffing requirements and appointing staff. (Private sources)

The final event which suggested potential problems for FE was the TUC's decision to withdraw support from the government's new training programme for adults,

Employment Training (ET). However, this was not so great a problem as might be expected, as the Times Educational Supplement reported on 16 September 1988:

"Although some colleges have acted as managing agents for the Youth Training Scheme (despite lack of enthusiasm from the Manpower Services Commission, which preferred to rely on employers) and have earlier adult training programmes, it is not an important source of funding and few are likely to risk trouble with the unions unless they are being pushed by an authority which wants to give the scheme the maximum possible support." (Times Educational Supplement, 16 September, 1988, p. 12)

However, in the same article the Times Educational Supplement also reports that many colleges were heavily dependent on selling off-the-job training to industry, and that:

"The reality for most college managements is not whether they will have to turn away work for ET, but how much of it they can get. That will depend not on the Training Commission but on the thousand or so managing agents all over the country. . . ." (Ibid.)

This article also points out the extent to which colleges of further education are involved in providing education and training for the unemployed. Up-to-date Department of Education and Science (DES) figures showed that about one in three of those who attend adult education courses were unemployed:

"An analysis of the figures indicates that something like 50,000 adult jobless take academic or commercial courses each year and nearly 30,000 are on courses run by extramural departments and voluntary organisations. In addition, some 90,000 attend courses in basic education." (Ibid.)

A further interesting point is raised, that:

".....unpublished figures given to the TES reveal that colleges and other educational centres are already providing courses for the unemployed on a scale which comes close to the ET target of 600,000 places." (Ibid.)

This series of events would suggest that further education has been and will continue to be reshaped from outside through government policy change. Its role, as originally conceived, was essentially to train individuals for employment and to supply industry with a well trained workforce. Assuming responsiveness to industry to be a desirable goal, and in the light of these supposed attempts to alter the direction of FE, it is worth asking whether the FE sector is in any way serving the purpose for which it was first established.

The majority of FE provision is designed to have relevance to industry. Yet FE still encounters criticism which indicates that in some sense it is not meeting the needs of industry. However, there is some question as to whether industry itself knows what its needs are and makes them explicit to further education.

A more pertinent question to ask is can further education survive the changes which are taking place now and are forecast for the future. The changes demand that certain criteria are met. Whether in meeting these criteria FE will become more responsive to the needs of business and industry is a question which deserves lengthy consideration elsewhere. So much depends on FE's ability to be flexible and to be able to read the indicators of change in sufficient time to be able to plan ahead and to be innovative. This may not be easy for a educational sector which is organised in a very complex way.

The further education colleges evolved loosely from the Mechanics Institutes and were designed to plug the gaps which persisted in the existing training provision. So further education stepped in, in response to government policy change, where industry could or would not. Its growth was therefore haphazard and incremental, and as a consequence, as David Parkes points out, reflects a lack of a central thrust or coherent

policy. (Parkes, 1982, p. 87) Local authority control of funding has also added variations to the quality and breadth of provision and over the country as a whole.

As outlined in the previous section, the system within and without the college is complex. As David Parkes, speaking from the point of view of someone who has worked within the FE system, again explains:

"We are sat in the middle weighed down with middle managers . . . our institutions complex because of the delegation of curriculum freedoms; shallowly independent; each level of independence checked by another - course tutor, head of department, dean, vice principal, principal, LEAs advisory and administrative, HMI, DES - a system allowing financial growth checks as each college acquires an identity and ethos purely in tune with a minority set of needs in its locality." (Parkes, 1987, p. 87)

The more complex the system is, the slower it may be to make decisions and introduce change. The system is a devolved one, but not without some national control through the DES and examining bodies.

A second handicap to flexibility is the idea of the course, which is the core of most FE provision. The FE colleges offer course packages to industry and to the general public. Courses operate according to a structured timetable which again operates in accordance with academic year limitations and staffing contingencies. Industry has requirements of its own which may not correspond to the courses on offer. Nor does industry operate on a 38 week college year. Changes are afoot which include extending the college year, but consideration of these is beyond the ambit of this research.

Third, it should be remembered that many further education colleges operate within tight budgetary controls. They have, until recently had little control over the allocation of financial resources, although this varies between local authorities. The colleges have

also been affected by national cuts in educational expenditure. So this is a 'hard-pressed' system financially.

Fourth, it would be incorrect to suggest that the colleges are totally inflexible, as might be suggested by the first point. There has been a certain amount of inflexibility which seems to be structural but colleges appear to recognise the need to evolve to cope with changing circumstances. Indeed further education can demonstrate a history of adaptation to curriculum changes, like the introduction of BEC and TEC in the 1970s and 1980s, of adaptation to technological change and changes in the occupational structure which affect course content. They have responded to the worsening unemployment situation and adapted courses to meet the needs of the unemployed. Finally, colleges have redesigned their courses to meet the criteria set down by the MSC. Some have achieved managing agent status under YTS.

Finally, individuals can also be inflexible and change can be threatening. Change can mean internal reorganisation and people respond by manoeuvring to protect their own positions and power bases. Changes in workload can also mean the breaking down of subject barriers which can lead to institutional uncertainty and a 'shake-up' in the hierarchy. Lack of knowledge of new methods and new funding mechanisms can also be a source of inflexibility, and fear of change can lead to an inability to act.

For the future, however, colleges need to act, to change and adapt. But more than this, there is a need to be innovative in the face of increasing competition from private training sources. The colleges are now operating in an completely different environment from the 1950s and 1960s and even the 1970s.

The indicators of the need for change come from a variety of sources. These are general trends as opposed to the events described earlier.

First, since the contraction in apprenticeships, demand for training has moved away from craft skills to short-term immediate labour market requirements that may be satisfied by the Youth Training Scheme and the Training Agency's new Employment Training Programme. Craft and Technician courses were once the backbone of the further education system. The quality of courses now open for further education to service for the Training Agency will be lower because of the time restrictions and the fact that they will be competing to supply this training with private providers.

Second, many colleges are currently heavily involved in providing training for young people under the Youth Training Scheme. These courses will be affected shortly by projected demographic changes. The DES envisages a projected fall in the 16 to 19 age group from 2.0 million in 1990-91 to 1.7 million in 1994-95. This compares with a figure of 2.4 million in 1985-85.

Third, the O and A level provision, now known as GCSE, which further education colleges have traditionally offered to adults and to those young people who preferred to leave school, may be returned to schools by the local authorities, especially in the light of falling rolls in secondary education. Some authorities have responded by combining post-compulsory educational provision in schools and colleges within tertiary colleges, which, in the words of Chris Farmer:

"... represent the extension of the comprehensive principle into post-compulsory education." (Farmer, 1982(b), p. 19)

Finally, the colleges have been forced into competition with private training organisations, the establishment of which the present government has encouraged. These organisations are much smaller than the colleges, have less rigid structures, and can operate at cheaper unit costs than their equivalent in the public sector.

Many colleges have risen to the challenge and are no longer totally dependent upon financial support from the local authorities. The local authority influence on the further education sector has been further depleted with the transfer of 25 per cent of NAFE funding to the Training Agency and the increased powers awarded to governing bodies under the Education Reform Act. Although many college principals and administrators may relish the prospect of reduced local authority control, comments in the NATFHE Journal, used earlier in this chapter, suggest a less sanguine response to the authority which the Department of Employment, through the Training Agency, can now exercise within further education.

The biggest threat to the further education colleges probably lies in the area of privatisation. The government, through the Training Agency, have implied a preference for privately organised training. Colleges are finding themselves in a situation where they are forced to compete with these much smaller organisations for the available work. The reduced power of the local authorities in further education affairs and the increased representation of business and industry on governing bodies suggests that the colleges themselves are being pushed in that direction too. The Polytechnics now operate independently of local authorities, and Deloitte Haskins and Sells state in their discussion document on the funding of vocational education and training that:

"In addition the Government believes that it would be appropriate for some colleges to have corporate status while still remaining within the local authority FE sector." (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 27)

The break up of the tripartite consensus and the establishment of the Training and Enterprise Councils with heavy business and industry representation, further strengthens the privatisation of training. The government were also planning a feasibility study to take place at the end of 1988, to look at the feasibility of privatising the skill centres, as reported in the White Paper Employment for the 1990s. (Employment, Department of, 1988) It is expected that the skill centres will be sold off individually or closed. Many of the skill centres are well located and equipped with modern machinery. If these are purchased by independent training organisations or conglomerates funded by business and industry, such organisation may be in a position to exclude FE from certain areas of work. These organisations may also forge strong links with the City Technology Colleges and the Training and Enterprise Councils. (Private sources)

This sort of development would squeeze out the further education colleges altogether, into some grey hinterland catering for less well resourced lower level provision for which the private agencies choose not to bid. The more likely scenario, is that some colleges will survive and indeed thrive in the new environment, while others continue to contract. Survival is likely to be amongst those who demonstrate the "capitalist ethos" and this could mean that the breadth and quality of provision will suffer. The challenge is to maintain both yet ensure survival.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing describes the environment within which the further education colleges have operated and attempts to demonstrate that further education colleges have a history of interpreting and responding to legislative and policy change. That environment has been characterised by an irresolvable tension between voluntarism and interventionism. There is the stated belief by governments and some industrialists that state intervention is not the panacea which will solve training and retraining problems, whilst privatisation of training to date is only partial. The return to the laissez-faire ethos which was characteristic of the 19th and early 20th century is clearly underwritten by a conviction based on the appropriateness of government intervention in for example providing training for the unemployed. It is still uncertain that, given the experience of history, voluntarism is the path to take.

Given this ambiguity and the expected contraction in certain areas of educational provision, for example General Certificate of Secondary Education courses (GCSE) and YTS, there are a number of different courses open to colleges of further education in the future. The first option is for colleges to provide training of a high standard, a standard which industry will find impossible to match and supplied in a form which suits industry's requirements. This will probably mean breaking away from the traditional course and term structure. Not only must the training be of a high standard but it must be recognised as such by industry and government alike. The second option is for colleges to focus on fairly low level vocationally oriented mass provision. For example the roll-on, roll-off, 6 week courses more typical of government sponsored adult training and retraining courses today. This could also include short preparatory courses for entry into polytechnics and colleges of higher education. Finally, given the

problem of falling rolls in schools and the closure of sixth forms and sixth form colleges, a college could opt for converting to mainly tertiary provision which can be linked into existing skills provision. Some colleges have already taken this route.

The next chapter looks at a particular college and how that ambiguity between voluntarism and intervention was worked out in practice. It looks at the ways in which the ambiguity manifested itself in the type of decisions made by college management with regard to the future role of the college, and the responses of teaching staff to change and to threatened change.

N O T E S

¹ The Royal Society of Arts was founded in 1754 for "The encouragement of arts, manufacture and commerce". In 1856 it began to organise examinations in science and commerce, although after 1882 it concentrated on commercial subjects.

² The Industrial Training Act of 1964 which created the Industrial Training Boards and the Employment and Training Act of 1973, set out the government's plans to establish a Manpower Services Commission under the Department of Employment. The Commission was to co-ordinate the work of the Industrial Training Boards, which were coming under increasing criticism, and to improve industrial provision in Britain. By January 1974 the MSC had been established. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

C H A P T E R 4

F U R T H E R E D U C A T I O N **W E S T B I S C O P C O L L E G E**

I N T R O D U C T I O N

This chapter attempts to capture the ambiguity of the difficult position in which the further education sector generally and one college, in particular, West Biscop, finds itself. This is a situation which arises out of its history which has been a chronicle of interpreting and responding to legislative change and providing a public service under conditions where resourcing has been inadequate. This is also a situation of ambiguity which arises out of the tension between voluntarism and state intervention which exists in British manpower policy, and which is perhaps reflected in the relatively poor level of resourcing in further education generally. For further education it is a question of responding in the most appropriate manner in an environment which is becoming increasingly competitive, in which the requirements of the market are changing, and in which sources of funding are no longer certain.

The problem for West Biscop, like other FE colleges was which market to serve and how to reconcile this with the principles of education and training which commonly informed institutional policy and educational practice for individual tutors. Indications as to the direction the college would take were unclear at the time of the research.

It is in this context that the issue of quality becomes important. What, in quality terms will be the future provision within the college? The quality issue is critical when funding is in question, because this casts light on the quality of current provision and because interpretations of quality held by the funding agent are the ones that count. Students and staff also interpret quality in slightly different ways since they have different interests which do not necessarily overlap, and quality is not fixed. This is explored in detail in the section entitled "Quality and a Strategy for Survival", and is pursued in the following sections which examine the college's relationship with the MSC. First, however, the chapter begins with some brief details about West Biscop College, its immediate geographical environs, and an outline of the curriculum.

THE COLLEGE

The earliest college prospectus that still survives, and possibly the first that was published, dates back to 1887 when West Biscop was known as the School of Science and Art. In the previous year, 1886, when the school was founded, more than 300 students registered for science classes at the school, which claimed to "afford good accommodation and sound teaching in the various branches of science, a knowledge

of which is now so necessary to all". (Syllabus of the ***** School of Science, 1887-8, p. 3) Engineering, Mathematics and Science Courses were offered in the evening and during the day; and a course listed as "Botany (for Ladies and Gentlemen)", was offered at thirty shillings per session. (Ibid.) By 1921 the institution had been renamed the Municipal Technical School and offered technical and commercial courses. (College Prospectus 1921)

In 1987-88 West Biscop College catered for a total student population of approximately 8,700. 1,700 of these were full-time students and the remainder attended on a part-time basis. The management structure, at the time of the research, was based on a traditional hierarchical model with two faculties and seven departments. The institution had a total staff establishment of around 250, and was the largest college in the Local Education Authority, where it acted as a focus for certain specialist and part-time advanced courses unavailable elsewhere in the county. For some of its more advanced courses the college drew students from throughout the British Isles.

West Biscop was situated in a small city which had a history dating back to the Roman settlement of Britain, and a small but thriving tourist industry. The city was the administrative centre for a predominantly rural county; and although the industrial sector had contracted over the last 20 years there remained at least one large high technology engineering company and several smaller electronics companies. Other industries served the needs of surrounding agricultural communities. The college had established close working links with many of these companies initially in offering courses for young apprentices and more recently through its role as Approved Training Organisation under the Youth Training Scheme. The county is one of the least densely populated in Britain, and were it not for the college's ability to draw students from other parts of the country, many of the more specialist courses for adults would be rendered unviable.

THE CURRICULUM

West Biscop offered a varied and comprehensive programme of full-time, day-release and short courses at both advanced and non-advanced levels. The structure of these courses might best be summarised by examining the provision in terms of the assumed future positions of students in the occupational structure. At the highest level were students potentially bound for professional, managerial and higher-grade technician and technologist jobs. These were on full-time higher, technical and business courses (B/TEC) and 'O' and 'A' level courses. At the middle level were the craft and junior clerical courses which led to craft-level technical jobs and junior office jobs. Students on these courses generally worked towards Royal Society of Arts and City and Guilds qualifications. The final level included part-time and full-time general and vocational education courses which did not fit neatly into the two upper level categories. Many of the increasingly shorter MSC funded courses and Certificate of Vocational Education (CPVE) courses fitted into this category. (Merricks, 1987, p. 32)

At the time of the research there were courses designed specifically for adults in most of the seven departments. However, these represented only a small percentage of the total provision. Nevertheless, adults could, and frequently did, fit into courses, where most students would be under twenty-one years of age.

The research focused on five of these courses which were specifically designed for adults. The courses were all within the Engineering Faculty and in two separate departments, the Electrical Engineering Department and the Building Department. I was

granted permission to interview all students, and engaged in classroom observation in the case of four of the courses. All courses were funded by the Manpower Services Commission under the Adult Training Strategy and recruited nationally, with the exception of the Wood Trades Course, which took students from the local area only. Because the Manpower Services Commission was the funding agency for these courses it was important for staff to maintain a good working relationship with the MSC local office.

QUALITY AND A STRATEGY FOR SURVIVAL

Private sector training may take place within industry or within private training agencies, and in line with criticism from industry, there were some within further education who acknowledged that private training agencies could have advantages in terms of greater flexibility and faster delivery. Their training was not geared to meeting defined student/staff ratios or to operating within a three-term, 38-week, academic calendar. Private training agencies did not operate under many of the conditions which were imposed upon the colleges of further education. From a competitive point of view these represented restrictions, yet many of these conditions were enshrined in the terms and conditions of employment of the teaching staff, for example the length of the college year. These were terms of employment which the staff and their representatives were understandably loath to relinquish.

According to one college administrator private training agencies operated under much the same principles as industry. He used the same phrases and words to describe the operation of private training agencies as he applied to industry:

"They can uncritically descend to the level required. They are much more opportunistic and much more responsive to the market. That is their *raison d'être*." (Interview: 15 June, 1987)

Undoubtedly private training agencies, for the most part, were in business to make profit and this dictated their level of responsiveness to the market. Colleges like West Biscop were not profit-making organisations and yet to survive they had to compete with these organisations whose orientations were so different. If it is impossible to compete on the cheapness scale with some private training organisations, then the alternative may be to isolate and develop those aspects of education and training in which FE colleges possess the means to excell.

DEFINITIONS OF "QUALITY"

This section begins by examining quality in terms of the experiences of the staff and students, and quality teaching is taken to refer to a subject matter which is both useful and relevant and which is conveyed in a manner which is interesting and comprehensible. Quality, however, is a contested term, subject to different criteria dependent upon an individual's position within the college. The aim is to assess whether within the framework of these five courses in the Engineering Faculty, the college was providing quality retraining. This by no means provides a definitive measurement of quality but it nonetheless provides a useful guide.

Staff at West Biscop perceived themselves vulnerable to attack from various sources. Firstly from central government through constantly shifting Manpower Services Commission policy and secondly, through decisions made at local government level. In the case of West Biscop, a combination of a reduction in support from the local authority together with an attempt by the MSC to introduce market-led strategies into training provision steered the college into seeking self-support courses. It also caused the college and individual tutors and administrators to examine the quality of the training they provided; many were defensive. Further education had long been the traditional mechanism for providing quality training; and this was claimed on two counts. The first was the professionalism of the staff and the second the level of resourcing and facilities available. However, this reputation emerged in those days when colleges could rely on a regular intake of apprentices from local industry. There had been a quantifiable reduction in further education's work in this area since, and it was expected to continue to contract. (Interview with administrator: 7 June 1987)

The question of quality is a difficult one. The definition of quality is not immutable and can be interpreted differently by public and private sector training institutions and by those providing the funding. As an administrator at the college pointed out when asked to compare the quality of training within the public and private sectors, definitions fluctuate in accordance with priorities:

"The quality argument means little because it is a generality. The only way to measure quality is to look very precisely at the criteria which the paymasters impose [that is], recruitment procedures, the delivery and the outcomes. There is no reason to assume at all, in spite of tremendous rhetoric, that the public sector is more successful or less successful in terms of labour market requirements and demands."
(Interview: 15 June, 1987)

This same interviewee was sceptical as to whether the "market" really required quality training, suggesting that there was evidence for and against that. He was moved to

criticise both the Manpower Services Commission and industry for their lack of any real informed understanding of labour market requirements and referred to the oft cited short term outlook of management. At one level he felt convinced the college locally was meeting the needs of industry, whilst on another level he questioned the accuracy of those perceived needs, both numerically and qualitatively:

"The needs of industry and commerce are much less to do with strategy and tactics than with opportunism. If you want to look at how FE in [this town] is meeting the needs of local industry and commerce you need only to look at YTS. I suspect in adult training it is not doing anything at all, although on YTS it is meeting the perceived needs of industry and commerce. It has now almost saturated the needs of local industry and commerce. (Ibid.)

Reflecting upon the type of training provided by some private agencies, the Principal of West Biscop also questioned the definition of quality training currently in use. For him, he said, quality was about developing the individual in an educative as well as training capacity. It was also about imparting skills which were transferable and capable of being built upon systematically over time:

"It is easy to sound biased, but a person in a one or two man/woman private training organisation . . . do they have the same 'people response'? We ought to examine very carefully the level at which the competition has taken place. To what extent have people accepted a greater accountability. I understand the complexity of it but do not expect me, so long as I have got a social conscience, just to reduce what goes on within this organisation to the level of economic competition. I have got to be prepared to accept some criticism. In part, it is the social conscience, the professional" (Interview: 3 August, 1987)

The Principal emphasised professionalism and his responsibility as a public servant to provide the best quality service to the client group. He felt it was not necessarily the role of public sector education to compete with private training organisations on the same economic basis. However, he was concerned to balance his remarks concerning the erosion of further education's monopoly of provision over the last eight years:

"Many of the private training organisations have a line within their budget which is excess of income over expenditure and no such line exists in my budget. I am not in it to make a profit. . . . I do not think my remarks are intended to indicate that the exposure of the FE service to some form of competition is necessarily bad. Even I can see areas in which there seems to be some sense in providing alternative forms of delivery." (Ibid.)

He then went on to express his misgivings over a system of training which attempts to open up opportunities for greater and greater numbers of individuals without due regard to quality, referring specifically to YTS and JTS. With regard to the now defunct New Job Training Scheme, he saw little evidence of systematic in-depth adult training and retraining within the scheme. He again expressed the need for balance and indicated that there were some very good quality one-year programmes in the public domain, and referred to courses within his own college:

"We have some computer aided engineering, some systems engineering - they are excellent. People do get employment, people are encouraged to, though it is not a positive outcome as far as the MSC is concerned. We are not a training organisation, we are education. Part of our job is to help people to develop themselves. The snag is they [the courses] are expensive, they take time, but they provide opportunities for the future. The New Job Training Scheme is a massive benefit to the job statistics, but my point is it makes very little difference as far as the acquisition of marketable skills for the individual is concerned." (Ibid.)

Tutors took a less global view of the issue and responded defensively when asked to compare public and private sector training provision, dismissing comments about lack of flexibility and rigidity in the FE system and focussing attention instead on the expertise of the teaching staff in FE:

"I do not think the training in industry can come anywhere near what we can provide. The Building Department is one of the best equipped. Decisions about class size are politics. We are all employed by the local authority and they are influenced by the government of the day. Private training organisations are trying to set up with people who have not been properly trained as teachers." (Interview: 1 May, 1987)

"It's not true that FE is not flexible enough, that is just a gimmick. They have to knock us somehow to say that they [industry] are better. Our

courses, my course, was taught by ex-industrial people who still had contacts in industry and so they had to be aware of present day needs of industry. We had close contacts with the major companies at all times to ensure we were providing what the industry wanted. . . . The building industry does not want courses in the summer because that is when they do all their work." (Interview: 12 June, 1987)

Competing with other providers for outside funding was a major issue for college management. Colleges cannot compete on the same basis as private agencies because their basic structures and goals are different. Colleges do not compete for profit, they are offering a public service and their aim is to impart skills and knowledge. Their staff are educators.

Management at West Biscop felt they could provide quality training that eluded the private providers. However, problems arose because of the criteria used by industry and government for measuring quality. It was suggested that for industry and government quality was generally measured by the ability to meet the short-term demands of the labour market. For West Biscop the issue was does the "market" recognise the type of training the college could provide as quality training?

Quality of provision depended on much more than the standard of teaching, it also encompassed resourcing and curriculum development. However, when asked for their assessment of the quality of the courses they took, students focused on the teaching content. Tutors were defensive about their ability to provide quality training and many were justifiably proud of their expertise. However, comments from the students showed wide variations in the quality of teaching. Most staff who were observed or interviewed were more or less strongly committed to their job and were effective teachers. A few excelled. There were a few others, however, who were roundly criticised by the students and for whom quality practice in teaching was not a priority. It may have

been that the individual teachers themselves were not suited to the task or that the structure within the institution did not allow for a sufficient number of checks to prevent abuse. This issue however, is outside of the ambit of this research.

QUALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Staff were anxious to stress the high quality of courses. However, this did not always correspond to responses from students relating to the quality of the course. Some criticism was directed at individual lecturers and other criticisms at course organisation and content; and comments made at the commencement of the course were less informed and less critical than those made at the end of the course.

When students were asked to comment on a course they invariably chose to comment on the quality of the teaching. Opinions varied from excellent to appalling, and students tended to agree in their ratings for each member of staff, except for one tutor whose more relaxed approach to classroom interaction and liberal use of handouts had him labelled as "lazy" by some (Interview: 9 March, 1986), and as someone with whom they could identify, as this student explained:

"The teaching was good, although I don't know anything about teaching techniques. They talk our language, they are all blokes with experience in the trade. . . . I like Clive's approach because it is casual. Rather than a teacher, he is one of you." (Interview: 2 July 1986)

Tutors who were rated highest were those who packed their lessons with meaningful relevant activity and were willing to spend time in and out of the classroom situation offering individual assistance where deemed necessary:

"I thought the teaching was first class. I also think the dedication the guys show and the personal interest they take in people is quite refreshing." (Interview: 8 May, 1986)

Those tutors whose teaching material was blatantly out of date or who appeared lazy or disinterested in the students and their problems were subject to the most caustic comments from students:

"Computers was a farce. The teacher himself did not know what the hell he was doing. I knew more than he did. He is a very bad teacher. When you asked him about a problem he said you work it out. . . . I gather he only learned to use computers the summer before we started. . . . Again on planning, he was absolutely useless. He tended to take the could not care less attitude. He would walk away from any problem. I was disgusted." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

The tutor who was particularly popular with his adult classes and acknowledged as a "good" teacher in terms of presentation and subject knowledge, was able to identify issues of importance to the students and to the course and was able to weave these into his lessons.

Not all tutors were so successful as the one just mentioned. Some pitched the level of presentation too low, failed to involve the students constructively in lessons and dictated lengthy detailed notes which the students' own experience informed them was unnecessary. These lessons were, as one student remarked "like watching paint dry". (Remark made during lesson out of earshot of tutor: 1 December 1986) Others approached their subject with a lack of imagination inducing tedium and sometimes indiscipline. When bored, these adults were not beyond throwing sweets and flying paper darts across the classroom.

Each group had a personality of its own and the Systems Engineering Course was particularly boisterous. The degree to which the students would engage in loud banter

during lessons was dependent upon the control the tutor was able to exert. This control was based on several factors and the degree of importance given to the various factors differed from tutor to tutor. After the first few weeks of the course a tutor was not able to maintain discipline by the mere fact of him occupying a position of authority. This authority had to be earned. Some tutors' strength lay in their command of their subject and their vast experience in the field. That it was important for teachers to be seen to possess knowledge and experience, over and above that of the students, was acknowledged by the better teachers when asked what they recognised as the basis of their own authority in the classroom:

"Respect for knowledge and ability and as a person that is the way I see it. It is no good relying on discipline. I think these people are looking for professional qualifications and if they can see that you have got a lot of experience in industry they know what you are teaching them is going to be worthwhile. Some of them are hungry for knowledge." (Interview: 12 June 1987)

The students appreciated the tutor who was approachable, the tutor who spoke the same language, and the corresponding backgrounds of students and staff aided in this. One student with considerable experience working on building sites in various capacities commented as follows:

"When I came here I expected a bit of teacher-pupil . . . but it is not. You can sit there and talk to them, even if you have a bit of bad language. Two fellas talking together . . . it is basically that really. It would cause trouble if they tried to be any other way, being all men." (Interview: 4 July, 1986)

The willingness to bend and be flexible to meet students needs was also important. It is worth mentioning again that the Systems Engineering Course, with an average age of around 24 years, could be a particularly intimidating group and demanded of the tutors not only mastery of their subject but skill in handling people. Both the Estimators Course and the Systems Engineering Course were unusual in that they

required a specific level of competency in mathematics, and it happened that sometimes students had not reached this level. The evidence suggests that inadequately qualified applicants were accepted on the course because of the desire on the part of tutors to fill every place or offer a training opportunity to a student who excelled in other areas but was below standard mathematically. As a consequence problems with mathematics were a constant source of complaint and a medium through which aggression was expressed for the Systems Engineering students, as was graphically explained by this student:

"The mathematician is chronic, he should not be here. He is too intelligent to be here. He even accepts that. He should be at a university I asked him to slow down and he said no, I cannot slow down for you. I said there is not just me here there are thirteen others. He went on and on and we started arguing. The rest of the class just sat back and listened. But he still did not cop on. Eventually he started to come down to earth a little bit. I went in and apologised because you cannot leave things like that. We both got worked up."
(Interview: 13 October, 1986)

All students acknowledged the tutor's competency in mathematics but at least 50 per cent found difficulty keeping up with his pace. The course tutor described at length the problems this created:

"This year the relationship with the course is catastrophic with some lecturers. They [the students] have problems with my subject - Principles, as well as Maths, because my subject relies on maths. . . . I feel that we do not have sufficiently high maths qualifications with our entry. We were too keen on filling up the course and getting it started within the deadline. The reason for this is because we did not get an adequate number of people at the first interview which was held a month earlier than the second. The whole plan for the start of the course was delayed as a consequence of a lack of eligible students. . . .

"It is a question of personality. I know Mr. Toward and have been taught by him. His problem is that he condenses everything and he expects students to get it. If they do not get it he will try and explain it to them but if you don't get it a second time he loses patience. In fact they made this comment to me: 'Why doesn't it bother you like that?' It does bother me. I am not going to get through my subject this time. So I will bend the rules. It is possible for the maths teacher to do that but probably he is older and perhaps does not want to do it." (Interview: 8 December, 1987)

The mathematics class was eventually split into two levels to take account of those who needed extra tuition.

The key to good classroom management seemed to be a question of balance, of being both an authority and an equal, and again the tutor's experience outside of education was perceived as instructive as a tutor pointed out:

"I think being an authority and being equal comes naturally because I have always dealt with people of that age. In terms of being a teacher or being a manager. I tried all sorts of management styles in industry. Most of them failed miserably. On a continuum between autocrat and democrat, I find that to get results you have to be able to move along that continuum line depending on the circumstances. You have got to be able to discipline someone who gets drunk, which I had to do two courses ago, and yet be equal enough to talk to them on a one to one basis. I do that now without thinking because I have done it for so long." (Interview: 12 September, 1986)

For the construction industry courses in particular, tutors brought the disciplines of the workplace into the classroom. This served the dual purpose of firstly, reorientating or "redisciplining" (Interview with tutor: 12 June, 1987) individuals who may have been out of work for up to a year, and secondly, imposing a control structure upon the classroom relationship which was familiar to the students and created a neutralised situation where the transfer of knowledge could be achieved without disruption, as a tutor explained:

". . . we run it like an industry. You have a boss and the boss has to be respected as a leader and authority; and they [students] tend to respect that and like it that way. They prefer the tutor of the course to be their boss and to be strong with them and prefer discipline. It is something I have taken direct from industry. A code of conduct is expected. Right from the interview stage we were looking for that, i.e. how they dressed and appeared at interview and what respect they gave to the interview . . ." (Interview: 12 June, 1987)

So workplace disciplines served as both an instructive teaching aid and a means of maintaining control. Those who favoured this approach felt there was room for aggression in handling "men" but emphasised the need to be "straight, fair and consistent". And these were the qualities those tutors teaching management skills for small businessmen and for building site managers were aiming to impart, partly by example.¹

Despite their appreciation of certain qualities in some tutors, students were aware of the machinations and manoeuvring of staff as they vied for resources and advantage. Students recognised another sphere of action going on behind the classroom facade which impinged upon the quality of the teaching they received. None of the students offered concrete evidence or attempted any explanation of why this should happen, except that it was the fault of "the system". These two quotations from students are rather more explicit:

"I think it is the teaching profession that needs sorting out myself. From listening to other students it seems that there is a lot to be desired in this college in all departments. They look after each other. It comes across especially with Clive and Newton. They are okay so they are not bothered about you too much." (Interview: 9 March, 1987)

"There is too much wheeling and dealing inside the college isn't there? The best lecturers I ever came across were people who had a job and did not want to lecture . . . Why is it that Mr. Leonard, who is a good lecturer, was never here. Why was that. Perhaps people get caught up in the system that is not of their own making. So it is still a generalisation and I would imagine the longer they are in the college the worse they get." (Interview: 9 March 1987)

This particular tutor, although generally acknowledged as a very good teacher, came under considerable criticism because of his lack of presence in the classroom. It appeared that because of his position as deputy head of department, a particularly heavy administrative load caused him to live a schizoid existence which was the result

of trying to balance administrative responsibilities with teaching duties. Whether this administrative workload was indeed so exceptionally heavy, and to what degree it related in some part to the workload undertaken by the head of department I was unable to ascertain.

It seems that tutors played a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining group morale and cohesion both positively and negatively. For example, as the Building Site Managers' Course was drawing to an end there was a general air of despondency in the classroom and especially during coffee breaks. Students were pessimistic about their chances of finding employment as building site managers, and there was a feeling that the promise that had spurred them to take on this workload, to live apart from their families for five days a week, and accept a reduced income was without substance. Two weeks before the end of the course only one member of the group had found employment. However, within the last two weeks 50 per cent of the course group had accepted suitable job offers.

Students were feeling discouraged and disappointed with the course on another count. During the last few weeks of the course it had been made official that this course was no longer to be funded by the MSC and would therefore no longer be run in its present form by the college. The staff too exuded an air of gloom and foreboding; and many of the students commented that the quality of the course had suffered over the last three months. One student complained that: " . . . the time since Christmas could have been better spent. We learned everything up until Christmas and have been treading water ever since." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

Over coffee one morning a student explained how the course tutor holds the group together and how the tutor had persuaded him to stay when he felt ready to abandon

the course a month prior. He was now grateful for the advice. During the last term the tutor's efforts in this direction seemed less concentrated as his attention must have turned to concerns about his own future, since the loss of two major courses in the department could have put his own job in jeopardy. When challenged about the low morale of the group the tutor dismissed this as typical for this stage in the course where students were chasing job vacancies and would soon be leaving the relative security of the college environment. Nonetheless the students perceived the tutor's action or lack of action to be a contributory factor to their current conditions of depression and disillusionment.

Where comments by students applied specifically to course content and organisation is was generally good and sometimes enthusiastic, as for example in the case of this Estimating student:

"The course is well organised. Every day there is something completely different to learn. I look forward to every day." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Comments about intensity varied from course to course and in accordance with the ability level of individual students. Overall the students felt the information being imparted to be useful and meaningful and would provide the basis of their requirements when in employment. As a result of the variation in background and experience of the students, some students thought less emphasis should be placed on certain aspects of the courses and more on others, although there seemed to be little consistency here. There were also some adverse comments about the usefulness of placements on some of the courses, although these were balanced by comments from students who found placements invaluable.

It is worth mentioning here the feelings of students on the Wood Trades Course regarding course organisation, since it demonstrates consistency of opinion between the students and staff. This course had in the recent past been reduced from thirty to ten weeks, following the Manpower Services Commission's decision to increase the throughput of trainees. The impossibility of preparing individuals for employment as joiners in only ten weeks preoccupied both staff and students. The students expected to emerge as competent joiners, but the tutors, recognising this as unfeasible within the time constraints chose to lay a firm groundwork at the expense of putting basic techniques into practice on more sophisticated joinery tasks. This did not meet the requirements of some of the students, and was the major source of complaint:

"The course has not met my expectations. Too much time was wasted. The work we have done has been good and constructive but when they try and fit a thirty week course into a ten week course - this is ridiculous. We must have spent a week planing pieces of wood and to me that was a waste of time. We have got to learn that precision - it is important. I appreciate that, but the amount of time we have been messing about - most of the lads think it is a waste of time. I would not fault the instructors at all. The only thing is there are not enough of them or they are never around if you want them. They are helpful - ten out of ten. They do not get annoyed if you do not grasp something. We have done joints on this course which I have never used. If the course had been longer I would have used them in pieces of work. I have not actually forgotten, but will have to think hard if I have to use that joint again." (Interview: 1 May 1987)

It appears that, for the students, responsibility for quality rested essentially with the tutors; and quality teaching was relevant, interesting and imaginative. A good teacher was able to remain an authority in the classroom and yet present material in such a way that the students felt they had a common identity with the tutor. Pitching the difficulty content of the lesson appropriately, flexibility, and student involvement were all important factors in achieving the balance. Tutors played a pivotal role in maintaining the morale of any group and this was particularly important with groups of individuals who were studying under difficult domestic arrangements as many of the students on

these five courses were. The tutor's ability to be effective in boosting and maintaining group morale appeared to be affected by circumstances outside the classroom. In this instance those circumstances included the loss of funding and impending reorganisation of the college. When morale was low the quality of the learning experience suffered.

Staff misgivings about courses being shortened were echoed in students comments, as in the case of the Small Building Business Course and the Wood Trades Course. The discomfort that students felt about being "short-changed" relative to students on previous courses, lead them to look critically at the quality and content of their training courses.

Students also recognised a sphere of action outside of the classroom, with which they had no involvement but which interfered with the attention teaching staff could give to the students. Sometimes this was because teaching staff were burdened with too heavy an administrative load or because they had other interests outside the classroom which commanded their attention.

As a final comment it should be noted that teaching on these adult courses was attractive to tutors because the level of work was higher and thus the status and monetary rewards greater. This is of course to put too mercenary a slant on teacher motivations because some tutors genuinely enjoyed working with adults and found the feedback stimulating and rewarding.

THE MANPOWER SERVICES COMMISSION AS VIEWED FROM THE COLLEGE

From casual conversations with many of the staff it was clear that tutors felt the MSC placed structural limits on the way courses were organised, over which they had little or no control. Many MSC decisions regarding courses seemed to be motivated by a need to cut costs and make savings, and tutors believed some of these decisions prevented them from providing what they believed were 'quality' courses. Examples of such decisions include the contraction of both the Small Building Business Course and the Wood Trades Course, which are discussed in detail in this chapter. Teachers thus saw themselves caught in a 'double bind'. They were concerned to maintain established quality standards on the courses, whilst being aware of their responsibilities as de facto agents of the MSC.

In common with other FE institutions, the college chose to bid for MSC sponsored courses and achieved managing agent status for YTS at the time of the research. The senior member of staff responsible for the managing agency was clear about the advantages of generating more disposable income than self-supporting courses (i.e. courses supported by funding other than Rate Support Grant or local rates) could offer, when the Rate Support Grant budget fails to keep pace with the rate of inflation. He pointed out that ten years ago there were virtually no self-supporting courses in the college and over 99 per cent of its work was funded by the rate support grant. (Interview with administrator: 7 July, 1987)

In contrast, by 1985-86 30 per cent of college income was provided by YTS and other self-support courses. The greatest benefit was felt at departmental level where

disposable income from self-support courses was marginally more than that received through the local education authority. (Ibid., p. 40)

This same member of staff acknowledged that the college was fighting an 'uphill battle', since FE was unfamiliar with the procedures and practices of tendering for work outside of the local authority; and there was the added disadvantage of MSC funding being based on occupancy level and geared to the private sector. This was, he pointed out:

"... much more economic and cheaper than the public sector provision because of unit costs, the level of investment, and resourcing and facilities." (Interview: 15 June, 1987)

Besides its traditional links with local industry and considerable success over the years in providing off-the-job training for young people on government retraining programmes, the college offered courses for adults under the old Training Opportunities Scheme (TOPS), the Job Training Scheme (JTS), the Wider Opportunities Programme, and more recently the Adult Training Strategy. It had also piloted a series of courses for the Manpower Services Commission, including a high technology engineering course. However, as a member of staff pointed out, when referring to the recently announced withdrawal of funding by the MSC from three of the adult courses upon which this research focussed:

"... traditions can breed traditionalism and one of the dangers of having a reputation is that it often encourages complacency. MSC funding mechanisms and training programmes change frequently." (Ibid.)

This member of staff was referring specifically to the recent withdrawal of funding but also what he perceived as the colleges' inability generally to adapt swiftly to the changing requirements of the MSC. The fault he believed lay at middle management level.

At a local level the MSC staff had little involvement in the day to day running of the adult courses which I researched. Under YTS the MSC monitor closely using ten criteria before awarding ATO status to the institution, which covers a three year period. Subsequent to this, monitoring is unspecified and infrequent, and determined by the Programmes Manager at the local MSC office. (Interview with administrator: 7 July, 1987)

For Adult Training Strategy courses the MSC monitored for local labour market demand and investigated to see if a course was financially viable, but beyond that, monitoring involved one brief visit when students were given the opportunity to voice grievances and have queries answered.

In the past, monitoring was much closer, as this tutor explained:

"We had to fill in a report sheet every week on every student. They [the MSC] were supposed to come round and inspect those and they did for the first two years and then it dropped off. It was an intensive course and they [trainees] had to cover certain stages within a certain time. It was well documented and it was well monitored. It comes down to money in the end." (Interview: 8 June, 1987)

This particular year the Wood Trades course was not monitored by the MSC at all, and the tutors spoke as if the MSC were neglecting the students and constantly harked back to the days when the course was 30 weeks long, as opposed to the current 10 weeks, when the MSC monitored more closely, as these two comments illustrate:

"You always had somebody once a year coming from London and probably twice a year from Birmingham and sometimes they would come together. Comments would come back and there would be meetings with the Principal afterwards. Since we were the first we were monitored very closely. Towards the end it dropped off because they knew we were on the right tracks."

"I have been here for 25 years this month. I think the way the MSC is operating now it is a bad thing. When we first started running these retraining courses for the MSC . . . it was a good thing then because they did it properly and they organised it properly and they made sure

we were doing it properly. Now it is a numbers game. MSC taking over worries me." (Interview: 5 January, 1987)

Basically the MSC gave approval for a course to be funded initially and gave permission for the course to run every subsequent year. Formally the MSC financed and controlled the course advertising. However, on two occasions I noted the college advertised a second time to reach a wider audience. For all the courses I researched, except the Wood Trades Course, one or two representatives from the local MSC office were present when prospective students were interviewed and in each case they played a prominent role. Then, once the course began, one or two visits were made principally to settle queries students may have had relating to allowances and other administrative matters. These visits were indeed brief as a tutor explained:

"Only by Geoffrey calling in and having a look occasionally. . . . But he would only stick his head around the door and say is everybody happy? He would never sit in on a class. . . . The only thing they [the students] will talk to Geoffrey about is money or the lack of it. Not about the course content." (Interview: 1 May, 1986)

The only exception to this pattern was the Small Business Course where a Course Management Committee was established composed of representatives from the college and the MSC. Its remit was to monitor the progress of the students and ensure that the money allocated to students to aid in the setting up of their businesses was spent correctly.

When any real difference of opinion over policy occurred between the MSC staff and the teaching staff it generally stemmed from the funding issue. The MSC were concerned with maximising the return on their investment in terms of numbers of trainees completing the course, whereas the tutors generally were concerned with course content and the wellbeing of their students.

Two of the courses had recently been reduced in length. The Wood Trades Course from thirty weeks to ten weeks and the Small Business Course from eight weeks to six weeks. In the first case making the course totally unviable from the point of view of the tutors, and in the second, placing the students under great pressure to complete the course in the time available. On another occasion a tutor was asked to increase his course intake by three to bring down the per capita cost for the course and to take account of a drop out rate of 2 per course on average. The tutor acquiesced but made his displeasure felt. He later explained in interview that:

"They [the MSC] seem to be very penny pinching to me. They will look at every minor claim and that really causes a lot of aggravation and problems because it is seen to be counter productive in financial terms."
(Interview: 12 June, 1987)

As part of the small business course students spent time at home doing preliminary work to set up their business, for which they were paid expenses covering transport, advertising, stationery and so on. The MSC perceived these periods as hypothetical and experimental and were careful to ensure that expenditure was not excessive and came within fairly narrowly defined guidelines. However, for the staff, and indeed the students, these periods were "for real", (Interview with tutor: 10 June 1987) and the money allocated should have been an appropriately realistic amount.

Almost without exception the tutors were critical of the living allowance paid to the trainees which had remained at the same level for seven years. (Interview with tutor: 12 September, 1986) In some cases tutors felt the low allowance might have explained a supposed diminishing pool of recruits and represented a handicap to learning. When asked, at the completion of a course, how the course might have been improved, a tutor suggested:

" . . . just greater support financially from the MSC so that we could have done a better job. The Financial strain on the lads all the time does sometimes interfere with their learning. They worry about finance. . . more worried about survival than the course sometimes." (Ibid.)

Interestingly, the MSC representative at recruitment interviews was always careful to ensure that trainees had some alternative means of financial support, an obvious acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the allowance. Cutting through the bureaucracy at local level presented the students with a major problem. Administrative difficulties over allowances sometimes dragged on into the third week of the course, causing distress and aggravation. The students made less of an issue of the inadequate allowances than the staff, unless specifically asked to comment. However, most found it necessary, where this was possible, to draw on savings to support themselves and/or their families whilst on the course.

There was little variation in the students' opinions of the Manpower Services Commission, and they generally did not go into detail since their experience of adult training courses was limited, except in one case where a student had enrolled on a TOPS course to learn bricklaying. Asked whether he thought the training courses were worthwhile, he recognised that such courses were of value but felt they were no substitute for the apprenticeship system, as he explained:

"Yea, but only for the right things. Features on buildings - they cannot show you in six months how to do that. If they made a distinction between bricklayers and master bricklayers that might make people happier. It is a class thing.

"I would not tell them on site I had been on a training course. They don't like you and if you do have faults in your work they say, "Oh he did a six months course". If they ask you, you tell them where you served your time you say I worked at Johnson's for nine years." (Interview: 1 May, 1986)

Everyone understood the macro level political implications of reducing the national unemployment figure. However their own experience of often lengthy periods of unemployment led them to appreciate the benefits that retraining, albeit on a meagre living allowance can bring. The following comment was indicative of a cross section of student opinion regarding the MSC:

"The MSC is obviously a government agency and it does what its political masters dictate. Again, as a personal opinion, I believe this government has tried very hard to mitigate the consequences of unemployment. Until I was in this situation it was never necessary for me to investigate other avenues of employment. I am quite impressed that these things takeplace." (Interview: 13 May, 1986)

Overall, the college's [that is staff and students] relationship with the MSC operated on two levels and these can be neatly defined as national and local. Essentially its inner workings were a mystery to most staff and nearly all students. It could be at once an unfathomable leviathan and a 'gift horse'. At national level it was monolithic and impenetrable whilst at local level it was bureaucratic yet could be supportive, sympathetic and accommodating.

For some staff the MSC provided the funding which kept them in employment and for the adult students on training courses, it supplied the promise of future employment. The relationship was indeed complex and often contradictory. Those staff who negotiated with the MSC appeared not to see the relationship as one of master and servant nor of provider and dependent. Instead the college was viewed as negotiating from a position of strength based on possession of expertise. The MSC bureaucrats were paid public servants and their function was to provide a service. The college could also provide a quality service and it was the responsibility of the MSC to channel that expertise to where it was most needed. However, it was frequently acknowledged that the official goals of the MSC were at variance with those of the college and

decisions could, and would, be made and carried through by the MSC regardless of the implications for West Biscop. The MSC were a major source of funding and this introduced an element of dependency. For that reason the staff were circumspect in their dealings with the MSC representatives.

The relationship between college staff and the MSC officials at a local level was generally good. These were two groups of people who understood each other, but who still maintained a distance based on their acknowledged differing orientations. The staff frequently voiced criticism of the way the local office operated, especially in the way they dealt with student claims for financial assistance. However, criticism on policy issues was generally directed at national-level decision makers. The role of the local staff was understood to be one of merely interpreting and putting into practice the policy dictates of Moorfoot and their political controllers.

There were two important issues which arise out of this brief discussion of the relationship between West Biscop College and the MSC. The first concerns the seemingly contradictory relationship and reliance on MSC funding. If the college grows to rely even more heavily on outside sources of funding it must develop an appropriately flexible structure and approach to enable a swifter response to frequent policy changes.

The second issue is the reduction in funding relative to the number of places provided on MSC sponsored courses. This was manifest in expansion in course numbers, shortening of course length, or the abandonment of the more expensive courses completely. The fact that the student allowance had not risen in line with inflation for a number of years, and the cutback in monitoring activity were both indications of a

determination to reduce costs. Some of the staff looked upon this as neglect and a threat to the quality of training they were striving to provide.

So, in a sense, both groups were working from two separate sets of principles. The guiding principles of the college staff were both educational and concerned with preserving their institution and their jobs. The MSC's guiding principles were essentially financial, that is, to train as many individuals as possible with a given sum of money.

Adherence by the MSC to such principles led to a policy decision, taken at national level and interpreted at local level, to withdraw finance from three courses within the Engineering Faculty at West Biscop. These were expensive courses to run by MSC standards and drew recruits from a national catchment area. Current MSC policy was to localise provision; and monies for adult retraining were being diverted to fund the New Job Training Scheme which was later transformed into Employment Training.

WITHDRAWAL OF FUNDING

In the early part of 1987, the college received news that it was about to lose a significant amount of Adult Training Strategy work, as a result of the MSC changing the delivery mode. These three courses were nationally funded courses and based within the Building and Civil Engineering Department. Those who taught on this course were in a favoured position since the advanced level status of the course allowed the staff to progress through the "efficiency bar" on the Burnham FE teachers' salary scales to senior lecturer status.

The courses represented about one quarter of a million pounds worth of work to the college, and the MSC explained the withdrawal in terms of changes in funding mechanisms and programming modes. The MSC intended to shift from long term to shorter courses, thereby enabling more people to be trained in a shorter times. The aim was also to concentrate on short term immediate labour market requirements rather than craft skills geared to vocational qualifications.

Tutors, whose jobs were threatened by the withdrawal of funding, scrambled to find replacement shorter courses that were acceptable to the MSC and could be funded and recruited locally. They were, however, convinced such courses could never be of the same high quality as the courses they had lost. They were defensive and concerned over the department's vulnerability to MSC policy change, as this extract from an interview with a tutor shows:

"The course was stopped because of government dictates. They planned to get the unemployment figures down for the election and therefore stopped spending money on high cost courses and ploughed it all into short courses for adults to get as many people off the dole. . . . That was the [local] MSC's own statement because it was purely a political manoeuvre. The courses they were running here were too successful. The local people (MSC) did not want to withdraw funding because they knew the replacement courses would not be so good. They say there is no take-up for these new short courses.

"We need the money. We need the finance. We may be too heavily involved and they are unreliable. They can pull the plug out anytime. They have no regard for colleges or training. They are just vehicles for taking money in and out as the government please. Their priorities are political I suppose. . . . It is hard to understand them. You give them a good course and get people into jobs and they pull the plug out." (Interview: 15 June, 1987)

For such tutors the college was the defenceless victim of MSC vicissitudes, and so were they themselves. Only one member of staff, feeling less personally threatened by the withdrawal of funding by virtue of his position within the college, looked to the

college's failure to respond both to changes in funding mechanism and delivery modes, of which he claimed the college had several months warning:

"It [the college] would need to resubmit bids to tender new programmes and retimetable staff. It would not have meant a radical change but it would have meant a quick response, an immediate response to changing reality. . . . There should be mechanisms that can make decisions or not depending on the timetable and time sequence and the funding providers. If that cannot be done we are on a hiding to nothing. Institutional inertia and a high level of ignorance caused the college not to respond. It is having the knowledge and not responding to it - it is complacency I suppose which is not the same as inertia."
(Interview with administrator: 7 July 1987)

At the time the withdrawal of funding was announced, the college was undergoing reorganisation consequent upon a merger with a smaller local college. This was a decision taken at the level of the local authority and was designed to save costs and rationalise the provision within the county.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been an attempt to describe the college, its staff and students, and to understand the complexity of its relationship to the MSC. In doing so, the emphasis has been on the way that the college was operating in a new environment which demanded adjustment and a move away from the traditional funding sources and traditional ways of tapping these sources and of organising courses. It is in the light of these concerns that the issue of quality becomes important.

Since the college was providing a public service and was not producing for profit, it could not generate its own finance,² but had to compete with other organisations for

available funding. This inevitably put the college in a dependency relationship with the funding agency. Funding sources are frequently short-lived and the college needed to develop techniques whereby it could quickly readjust to new situations when a particular source dried up. Thus the college could reduce its level of dependency. This, however was just one of the many adjustments facing West Biscop as the college management decided in which direction the future lay.

N O T E S

¹ See the work of Gleason and Mardle, who uncovered similar patterns of control and regulation in their study of apprenticeship training in further education. During the course of their research they discovered that the college which was the subject of their study:

" . . . identified most strongly with the objectives of local industry, most particularly with regard to the need for a predictable supply of trained personnel. Thus, as a consequence, the college tends to reflect rather than challenge the immediacy of the demand from industry that young workers should be more 'productive' in their work. Consequently, the conditions of learning in college in terms of its organisation and physical layout, tend to mirror the working conditions from which most students come. Thus hard and fast rules concerning time-keeping, behaviour and access to resources, are rigorously applied in conditions which are often dirty, noisy and potentially dangerous. . . . to this end college authorities insist upon strict registration throughout the day and warn students in the prospectus . . . that reports concerning progress will be forwarded regularly to employers." (Gleason, D. and Mardle, G., Further Education or Training?, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980), p. 32.)

² Except perhaps in the case of consultancy fees and similar services. These, however, fall outside of the range of this research.

C H A P T E R 5

R E T R A I N I N G I N F U R T H E R E D U C A T I O N

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Previous chapters began with a broad view of the impact of national training and retraining policy on further education colleges, and then focused specifically on one particular college. This chapter continues the focus on West Biscop College and looks at five adult retraining courses through the perceptions and experiences of the staff and students who were involved with the courses. The chapter is about recruitment to retraining courses and the outcome of such courses. In terms of outcomes the college was concerned to provide general competencies. These may have been specific technical skills or teaching students to think and see themselves in particular ways, to enable them to effect a transition from one point in their lives to another.

The chapter begins with an outline description of the five courses which were researched in detail. The following two sections, which describe briefly the characteristics of both staff and students at West Biscop, are also provided by way of an introduction to the remainder of the chapter. The final and major section of this chapter looks at the retraining process, what it is, why people choose to retrain and how they cope once they join retraining courses. Their motives are examined, as are the circumstances of their lives which impinge upon the decision which led to a place on a course. Particular attention is given to the tutor's concern to develop confidence in the students which would enable them to take on the mantle of a new occupational role.

THE COURSES

Five courses were examined over a period of approximately 18 months. All of the courses were within the Engineering Faculty and all courses, with the exception of one, were in the Building and Civil Engineering Department. The one exception was the Systems Engineering Course which was in the Electrical Engineering Department. Bearing in mind time constraints, where staff and students proved more co-operative, courses were researched in greater detail. This is reflected in the volume and nature of the information which is given in this section.

SMALL BUILDING BUSINESS COURSE:

In the Spring of 1986 I began my research at West Biscop by interviewing students and staff involved with the Small building Business Course. This was a six week course which included two week-long periods when students returned to their home town to commence the first steps of setting up their business. A tutor described the course as designed specifically for the small builder, someone who was probably a 'craftsman' but "able to turn his hand to other things". (Deputy Head of Department speaking at precourse seminar: 15 April 1986) This person may lack the basic expertise of dealing with finance and customer liaison. In other words he or she will be "a person who is practically sound but administratively weak. . ." (Ibid.)

The course covered marketing techniques for setting up a small business, negotiating and setting up contracts and estimating for work, bookkeeping, and the legal implications of becoming an employer. A section of the course was also devoted to developing communication skill and dealing with employees and other contractors. Both the college and the MSC deemed the course to be successful if the business was set up within two to three months of completing the course, and was still operating 12 months later and hopefully employed one or two people.

The college was able to offer the course from 1981 onwards after permission was obtained from the MSC to run a pilot course. The course was devised by a member of the teaching staff, but has altered over the years because certain items on the syllabus were deemed to be inappropriate to the needs of the small builder; and the MSC took a decision early in 1986 to cut the course by two weeks. Since 1981 two courses per year, with approximately 12 students per course, had been offered at a

residential adult education center in a small town approximately 20 miles from the main college.

It was difficult to discern exactly why the adult education centre was used for the course in preference to the main college. The following course, which was the final Small Building Business Course run at West Biscop was moved to the main college premises. If the college was looking for a location which provided the conditions most conducive to learning, they could not have chosen a more suitable setting. Students were sufficiently isolated to allow them to concentrate fully on the course, and accommodation and the meals service provided by the centre was of a high standard. In terms of course costs, the centre was no more expensive than using the main college since students using the centre were not paid a lodging allowance. However, staff had to travel to the centre daily to teach the course and this increased costs. The staff were generally unconcerned about the inconvenience of daily travel since travelling expenses added to their monthly salary. I could only speculate that use of the centre was based on a political decision: that it was important to the local authority that the teaching centre was in continuous use. During the home periods students are visited by tutors in an advisory capacity and three months after completion of the course a tutor again visited each student to check on progress of the business and offer advice where this was necessary.

Staff described the course as intensive, from nine in the morning until nine in the evening. As a member of staff pointed out when addressing students at the evening seminar which preceded the personal interviews held the next day:

"The course load is heavy. I think you should know the intensity of the course. It is a worthwhile and good course and it is for real."
(Chartered Institute of Builders' Course literature)

For a few students the intensity and workload proved a strain, but the majority coped well and two or three of the younger, better qualified students found the pace too slow, although they all felt the course worthwhile.

BUILDING SITE MANAGERS' COURSE:

In autumn of the same year I returned to West Biscop to begin researching the Building Site Managers' Course. This was a longer, 26 week course, including two placement periods when students spent two weeks on each occasion on site with various building concerns. The course was intended to cover all aspects of Building Site Management and led to the Chartered Institute of Building Site Management Diploma which entitled the holder to Associate Membership of the Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB). CIOB literature states that:

"Within the building industry, the site manager holds a key role. He must have organising ability, energy and leadership and most of all he must make decisions quickly and independently which keep the job moving and at a profit." (Ibid.)

A member of the teaching staff explained that it was still possible to take up employment as a site manager within the building industry without this qualification, but the larger building companies were now demanding it. (Interview with tutor: 22 January, 1987) The usual career path for a building site manager meant beginning as a tradesman, then moving through chargehand and foreman to site manager. Individuals may later progress to contracts manager.

The course included management techniques, health and safety, communications, industrial relations, legal aspects, planning and surveying, and was continually assessed

by assignment and progress. More than anything else the tutors were concerned to develop confidence in the students, but as with the Small Business graduates, that confidence came from practical knowledge. Students rarely failed; the failure rate was around four per cent and was generally due to poor attendance or poor performance on project work. (Ibid.)

As with the Small Building Business Course, tutors were prepared to tutor students individually or set extra work for those who found the course difficult:

'. . . they are given plenty of chances. Some people just won't make an effort. A person who is not very bright who works hard and gives 100 per cent, we would endeavour to get him through. There are limits to it but generally they can cope with extra help. If they were that bad they would not get on the course or would pull out themselves. They withdraw themselves once the assignment work gets too hard. (Interview with tutor: 22 January 1987)

The syllabus was set by the CIOB but each tutor was free to interpret the syllabus in the manner felt to be most beneficial to the students. The course had to have CIOB and MSC approval and the CIOB monitored the course through attendance records and an annual personal visit and questionnaire to students.

ESTIMATOR\SURVEYORS' COURSE:

As the research on the Building Site Managers' Course was drawing to a close I began interviewing students on the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, the Systems Engineering Course and the Wood Trades Course. I was also able to observe classroom interaction on the latter two courses.

The first of these, the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, was devised by staff at the college in partnership with the MSC; and the Construction Surveyors' Institute (CSI) was the main validating body. Monitoring by the MSC was minimal and the CSI visited the college twice a year when they interviewed students. The course was described as intense by staff and students alike with placement periods in industry; and it led to licentiate membership of the CSI. Students were not examined but were continually assessed throughout the course.

The course covered estimating, surveying and measurement techniques, site levelling, the use of computers, building technology, management techniques, contract law and mathematics.

NATIONAL TECHNOLOGY CERTIFICATE IN ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING COURSE:

The National Technology Certificate in Electronic Engineering was a one year retraining programme commonly referred to as the 'Systems Engineering Course'. It was modular and based on Business/Technician Education Council (B/TEC) National Certificate in Electronic Engineering. This was the fourth year the course had been offered and it was originally funded under the old TOPS programme. Like the other courses studied it was, at the time of the research, funded under the Adult Training Strategy (ATS). As with other courses the syllabus was originally devised by the former course tutor and approved by B/TEC and the MSC, and had changed only a little over the years as certain units were updated. The intention was to provide students with a sound understanding of electronics and systems. The systems instruments and

control elements were a college innovation to "make the course more useful from the employment point of view". (Interview with tutor: 2 May, 1986)

The course was designed to condense a three-year part-time course into one year full-time, and although the work was intensive it was not considered by the staff to be at a high academic level. However, students were tested on each module and were required to reach a certain level of competency before they could be awarded the certificate. The pass rate on average fluctuated between 60 per cent and 75 per cent of the students in each group. As with the other courses those individuals who were likely to fail arrived at this conclusion themselves well before completing the course and withdrew. This course, together with the Wood Trades Course was unaffected by the MSC's decision to withdraw funding from adult retraining courses at West Biscop.

WOOD TRADES COURSE:

The Wood Trades Course was a ten week 95 per cent workshop based course, which consisted of a central core module followed by a number of option modules. The remaining 5 per cent of the time was spent in the classroom.

It should be noted that this course was shortened from thirty to ten weeks, which altered the character of the course markedly. The original course, also sponsored by the MSC had run for fifteen years with an 80 per cent employment success rate. The staff took pride in their craft and treated the task of providing individuals with a job qualification with seriousness and dedication. They were intent on turning out craftsmen and within the new 10 week course this was patently impossible. So, the

staff responded by using a stricter set of criteria for course recruitment, and according to the deputy head of department were having problems filling the course.

For the Deputy Head of Department it was the "attitude of mind of the staff" (Interview: 13 May, 1986) that needed to be changed:

"I believe that for anyone who is unemployed this ten week course will enhance their job prospects. For the long term unemployed it will still provide them with a life skill." (Ibid.)

He was not, however, totally unsympathetic towards the difficulties the staff were facing and acknowledged the discrepancy between MSC requirements and craftsmanship. To be viable, the shortened course, had to be, in effect, a totally different course. One of the more mature students described it as an "improver's course". (Interview: 1 May, 1987)

Both this student and the member of staff who took responsibility for most of the teaching on the course believed the MSC was neglecting quality in favour of quantity:

"The thirty week course was carpentry and joinery and we did full size roofing. This is a ten week woodskills course."

"All they are interested in is getting as many people into training as possible and not interested in whether it is good or bad. A bloke is not going to last very long in a job after ten weeks and that is going to make him feel worse."

"Up to 80 per cent got jobs [on the thirty week course] and hold those jobs now. These chaps, unless they are going into toy making or some rural crafts, they do not stand a chance." (Interview: 8 June, 1987)

Reducing the course from thirty to ten weeks may have represented bad educational practice to the teaching staff, but they could do no more than make these small individual protests. Ultimately they were powerless to resist.

THE TEACHING STAFF

Anyone who has worked or studied within a college of further education has suffered the discomfort of draughty prefabricated buildings and the inconvenience of transferring between annexes. It is obvious to the observer that the strength of the further education system in the United Kingdom is not based on its fine up-to-date buildings. Indeed, the strength of the FE system probably lies with the teaching staff, with their wealth of relevant industrial experience, as Bob Hollyhock, writing for the Further Education Unit comments:

". . . because experience has shown that FE is still using out-dated and inconvenient annexes in many cases . . . the attraction must be the major resources i.e. lecturing staff." (Hollyhock, 1982, p. 46)

Gleason and Mardle found that the technical teachers in their own study had similar backgrounds to their students and could "consequently share with them a similar experience of the stresses and strains of the work process". (Gleason and Mardle, 1980, p. 26) This was, for the most part true of the lecturing staff in the engineering Faculty at West Biscop College; and was also for a number of the tutors the basis of their authority in the classroom, as indicated above.

Staff who taught on the course, and who were interviewed in depth, had a background in business or industry; and they used anecdotal material from this experience to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching material or to inject levity into what might be an otherwise dull presentation. Some teachers had as much as thirty years teaching experience and others only two or three. The length of teaching experience

seemed to bear no direct relationship to the quality of teaching, except perhaps that newer teachers appeared to be more in touch with the industry. That statement is, however, made with caution since no attempt was made in the course of the research to confirm this fact.

Neither was the research designed to present an analysis of the motivations of further education teachers, except where this impinged upon the main themes of the thesis. It is worth stating, however, that the findings concur with those of Tipton, that FE teaching staff leave industry for instrumental reasons rather than any "strong sense of missionary zeal" (Tipton, 1973, p. 49) which, if it arose, took secondary place. It should be noted, however, that the more able teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to their craft and protective attitude towards their students when either the MSC or the college bureaucracy proposed changes which they judged not to be in their best interests. Tipton suggests that the relatively low incidence of teacher training qualifications demonstrated a strong instrumental orientation amongst the FE teachers at Jones College. (Ibid., p. 56)

Whilst it is true that unlike school teachers the FE teacher may not have undergone teacher training, (Hollyhock, 1982, p. 46) the situation since 1973 had altered with both management and unions advocating and working towards an all-graduate profession. This was not necessarily the case in General Studies, Computing or Management where staff were likely to have entered teaching on completing full-time education with a university degree.

The teaching staff had technical qualifications in their own subject areas and teaching certificates which were generally gained through in-service training. Those who had degrees obtained them through part-time study or through the Open University.

For the most part FE teachers have enjoyed greater autonomy and more generous holiday entitlements than school teachers and are not subject to the pressures placed on their counterparts in higher education to research and publish. Although, undoubtedly the picture varies from college to college and local authority to local authority, the 'system' had indeed been tolerant and accommodating. However, there was evidence to suggest that the legislative changes and economic pressures already outlined in this chapter were 'squeezing' further education.

THE STUDENTS

The single characteristic held in common by all the students was their previous employment experience, either in the construction industry or in engineering, depending on the course they chose to follow. Other than that, they emerged from a wide variety of backgrounds, socially and occupationally. Seven had worked abroad in the recent past, mainly in construction and two had 'bummed' around Europe, the Middle East and North Africa shortly after leaving school. Their ages ranged from 20 to around 55 but most fell within the range 25 to 35. A few, principally the younger students had taken 'A' levels and/or studied at Higher National Diploma level (HND), whilst others regretted having not worked harder at school. As might be supposed, educational experience and ability varied widely. Some found their course lacking in challenge whilst others struggled hard to keep up.

Except for possibly two or three cases all of the students were ostensibly unemployed prior to joining the course. The students were asked their reasons for choosing to retrain and all said that they were looking to improve their job prospects, as did this student on the Systems Engineering Course.

"I am qualified in telecommunications. Trained in the army. Sent off lots of application forms for different jobs but have not got the paperwork [certificate of qualification]. With electronics it is going to be the future thing. I decided that if I can get this qualification combined with what I already know in telecommunications I will have a chance of getting a good job with a firm like Plessey, whom I want to work for."
(Interview: 6 October, 1987)

This was by no means the only reason given for choosing to retrain, but it was predominantly the major reason.

THE RETRAINING PROCESS

Ambiguity, which is characteristic of national manpower policy and the interpretation of that policy, and which was discussed in earlier chapters, was also present at the classroom level at West Biscop. This is, in part, a reflection of the absence of clear delineation between the areas of education and training. These courses at West Biscop were labelled retraining courses, yet there was a strong educational element in all of the courses. Further education colleges are also in an ambiguous situation structurally. They have traditionally provided instruction in areas commonly recognised as education or training, and as government programmes for the unemployed have developed, colleges have moved into this area too.

Training or retraining provided by further education colleges is a complicated and contradictory process and this is experienced by both students and teaching staff in different ways. Alongside the development of new practical skills, students at West Biscop were taught to reason and see themselves in new ways, either as skilled workers, as technicians or as management personnel. This educational process was an important part of retraining. At the completion of the course, this new way of seeing themselves, or confidence in themselves and their abilities, was placed highest by the majority of students as the most important outcome. If this was not stated explicitly it was implied in their conversations. The students claimed confidence was a natural outcome of the possession of skills and knowledge and not something which could be taught in isolation. However, an examination of the teaching techniques used by the better teachers suggests that confidence building was an important part of the syllabus. This could be seen in several of the techniques which teachers employed, such as group work, project work, individual and group presentations, the injection of competition and the use of simulations.

THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Unlike those individuals who retrained in industry the adult students at West Biscop made a positive conscious decision to undertake retraining. This decision was invariably related to changes in the circumstance of their lives. Generally such circumstances were perceived by the student to be connected to career, for example a lengthy period of unemployment (particularly for those students on the joinery course); a need to move to more interesting work, a need to move to less physically demanding work, a need to progress, achieve security and so on. In the case of

students on the Estimators' course retraining in further education was a short-cut to a qualification, an alternative to a university or polytechnic quantity surveying course. Underlying this there seemed to be a sense of encountering a watershed situation in one's life, a time to choose, and the possibility of implementing change; and for some students there was evidence that personal and domestic, as well as occupational factors, impinged on this.

The evidence suggests that when a person held a job which provided a wage sufficient for him or her to maintain themselves and their family, with a reasonable amount of job satisfaction, they were unlikely to abandon it in favour of retraining in further education. To justify the effort, the loss of income and lack of security that abandoning employment brought with it, the individual needed to be motivated by some stronger force, and perhaps have some means of financial security for the duration of the training. For example, in each of the course groups two or three of the students had worked for building companies abroad, usually in the Middle East. Two had worked in South Africa and one in the Falkland Islands. On return to Britain they found it difficult to pick up employment offering a comparable salary to that they were accustomed to receiving abroad, and retraining offered them the opportunity of increasing their earning power. In addition, any savings they were able to amass whilst working abroad gave them the added security they needed, rather than depend solely on the training grant.

However, for many of the students across all the courses, retraining followed a sometimes lengthy period of unemployment and their principle motivation in taking the course was to find employment. Others had shifted from low paid job to low paid job with no prospect of advancement. From such a position giving up a wage in favour of a training allowance looks like less of a deprivation, as these two comments suggest:

" . . . I was working on a building site as a labourer. I did not look on doing the course as a sacrifice." (Interview: 8 January 1989)

"I lost my job two weeks before the course started. It was a big worry at the time. I started my apprenticeship with one company and was made redundant. As soon as I finished my apprenticeship I was laid off again. I was getting pressured from all angles . . . girlfriend . . . stepdad - I was giving him money and living in his house. On the dole . . . I might have been out on the street. (Interview: 6 October, 1987)

Most of the trainees interviewed had experience working on building sites. One of the tutors pointed out that a building site worker should never be unemployed. He was indicating that the 'informal economy' could provide income for those not holding down permanent jobs. In fact when selecting candidates for building courses such 'entrepreneurship' was given favourable consideration. But the 'informal economy' could provide only a temporary and insecure source of income for workers with families to support, as one ex-building site worker explained.

"Yes, I was unemployed for 12 months, and 18 months before that. The 'black economy' if you like . . . if I was off for 12 months I would not starve, but you get 'cheesed off' with doing it . . . you are working for people who are paying you in the hand; you are working for people who know nothing about what they are doing. They give you a set of plans and you get on with the job. The money is not good, but put it with your dole money and you have got a good wage.

"There is no way that people can manage without doing a bit on the side. On the money that you get you are just surviving. The environment if you like puts pressure on you to buy and have things. You have got to have the same clothes as your mates, at least the younger ones do. To go to discos, and booze, and you must have money to do it." (Interview: 13 May, 1987)

For many on the construction industry courses this qualification was the key to security and freedom from financial worries, perhaps a company car and a job where you wore a suit every day. Only a minority of the students, the younger ones, defined themselves as ambitious. In fact, all set themselves attainable goals, even those who saw "getting on" as a priority, or who had been spurred to obtain an education

because of some experience in their lives. All placed financial security high on the list of priorities, but the circumstances that led them to seek it and the importance they attributed to education in attaining that security, differed. Only a few expressed an urge to be socially mobile or related it to "getting on" or achieving financial security. This is discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. It was difficult to distinguish between the watershed situation and ambition as motives for retraining since ambition was generally expressed in monetary terms and the watershed situation was frequently a result of stagnation in income. The following comments, from a student on the Estimators course, was typical of the response of the younger students when asked why they chose to retrain.

"Money has something to do with it. Previously I was a joiner and on that kind of money there was no way you could have a decent living. A decent wage would be 200 pounds for a joiner and I have been used to 100 a week, which is not enough to bring a family up on. I am single at the moment, but I am thinking of the future. I think estimators are paid quite well. Also the life of a joiner is not very glamorous, you work outside a lot." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

For most of the older students, those in their mid-30s onwards, life on building sites was appearing less and less attractive and less and less within their physical capabilities:

"I am thinking of the future really. I did not really want to be doing what I was doing before the course in fifteen or twenty years time. I will not be able to earn the money. I was sub-contracting for the last ten or twelve years. It is getting to the point that I won't be able to keep up. Bits wear out." (Interview with student: 8 January 1987)

Or they had been self-employed builders for a number of years and either the pressure of work, or a drop in business, had forced them to look elsewhere. Like the younger students, they too were looking to the future and concerned to secure an income for themselves. For this once self-employed builder the course leading to a qualification as Building Site Manager seemed the perfect solution to his dilemma, even though the

course was not recommended by the Construction Industry Training Board as a suitable course:

"I had been self-employed for about three and a half years and started off in a small way. I had wanted to go into speculative building . . . but the source of land just dried up. Building land is very expensive. I had to find something else to do My wife is keen on me going to college and getting qualifications. It was always the length of time that put me off. It would take four years at night school. I really did not know what I wanted. I was a bit too old to start studying like I had at school. I made a lot of enquiries about this course. I 'phoned up the MSC and the CITB who did not recommend it, but did not seem to know anything about the course. He [a CITB spokesperson] said he thought I ought to take a more basic course and build up to get a proper qualification. This qualification is not one that is widely recognised in the profession, it is a new one. I could see exactly what he was doing - it was his job to promote his organisation's courses." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

Some of these individuals had reached a 'watershed' situation in their lives and retraining offered a resolution to their predicament. Some found themselves in frustrating and unhappy work situations that demanded radical solutions. The following quote comes from a student in his early twenties who enrolled on the Small Building Business Course:

"I went into local government as a building surveyor, which I enjoyed because I was more or less my own boss; I was looking after some big jobs. But you still had that feeling that over your shoulder someone was watching what you were doing, just waiting for you to make a mistake, so that they could drag you down. I would rather go into business and take all the responsibility myself; if there is a mistake made I know it is my own fault. I am then the one who has to answer for the consequences. You are tied down if you work for other people. Tied down to their methods, and looking at it as an employee you can see places where their methods are lacking." (Interview: 13 May, 1986)¹

This individual had taken voluntary redundancy and was able to survive ten months without employment, taking courses, acquiring new skills and reassessing his life. He talked of watching many people in the latter part of their lives reflect on their mistakes and ask themselves why they did not take opportunities when they were presented.

At this early stage in the course he was fired with determination and enthusiasm:

"It is difficult to say what you feel about yourself. I do work hard, I am not lazy. I work hard and play hard. If I do put my mind to something I finish it. I have just got to the point now when I am fed up with being able to do what I want. . . . I am going to direct myself now. I have decided I am going into business and going to make a success of it. I am determined to make a success of it." (Interview: 13 May, 1986)

Other students were looking for a challenge or change or the opportunity to make use of talents or abilities they believed they possessed. They perhaps saw themselves getting into a "rut", which was perceived as demanding an equally radical solution as the situation described above. The following comments were made by a student who proved himself extremely competent by the standards of the course. However, through a series of misjudged decisions, he found himself in a job which stifled his abilities:

"I was a site engineer - in engineering for 7 years. Through personal circumstances I took voluntary redundancy and got a local job. I did that for a year and we decided to move up into this area. The idea was that I would stay with my present employer and travel, and reap the benefits of cheaper property etcetera. Unfortunately, just before we moved, I was made redundant through lack of orders. Now I am living in a new area where the work is not so good. I did some casual work and worked for Fawcett Products which is a packaging company. I just realised I was getting nowhere and wanted to get back into the construction field again." (Interview 30 September 1986)

The qualification the course would provide was the means of getting out of that "rut" and a method of compensating for unproductive or misdirected encounters with education in the past. A surprising number of students of various ages felt that their basic education had been neglected or that they had taken the wrong decision or were ill-advised on a suitable career path as young people, as did this young estimating and surveying student:

"At school we were never given any possibilities. It was mostly go to the local factories, work on a farm or join the army." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

They realised the direction their career was leading them and were attempting to adjust this by correcting what they perceived as miscuing in their secondary education, as these two comments illustrate:

"I did not like the job I was in and saw the advertisement. There was advancement; an opportunity for a better education. For my own satisfaction I had to prove that I could do it. . . . At the time I wanted to get off that stupid little job I was in. I was getting into a rut and I wanted to get back into full-time education which I missed at school." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

"I have never been unemployed except when I first left school for a few months, but that was when there were a lot of jobs. I did not want to work to be honest The last year I had not bothered to study for 'O' levels. I just wanted to leave school This is something I regret. They tried to find me a job as a librarian, but the thought of spending every day in a library was dreadful. I still would not work in a library, but I do wish that I had gone to university. I could not really see what I wanted to do." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

For one student the return to education was almost like a reawakening, a recognition of self and the resolution of a long held ambition:

"Basically, ever since I can remember being able to understand my nature, I have understood slowly that I am the kind of person that wants to keep learning. I feel I have never learned enough. I like to learn I started to learn in my teens - about fourteen or fifteen. I gained a sense of perspective, to view myself from the outside." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

Although, when asked directly whether their decision to retrain coincided with changes in their personal lives, students denied this, it was clear from casual conversations that changes had taken place that had caused individuals to reflect upon themselves and their futures differently. In some cases this was a consequence of reaching maturity, of looking towards the future, perhaps planning to marry or raise a family. For some others long established relationships were failing. These issues were discussed and information was offered in confidence which does not therefore form part of this research. Such confidences are mentioned, however, to illustrate the conditions under

which some students were undertaking retraining and to suggest that the circumstances of retraining can sometimes offer the opportunity to reassess and develop a new sense of direction or lead to a resolution of a marital situation which is failing. The geographical separation imposed on most of the students in this research put strain on some relationships and for one student, the time he spent away from his wife during the week allowed him time to contemplate the situation in his marriage and arrive at a decision to apply for a divorce.

THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

A chance of a place on a retraining course rested with the tutors who interviewed applicants. The evidence suggests that selection decisions were based on a variety of objectively and subjectively defined criteria and time and financial constraints imposed by the educational institution or the funding body. This section explores the procedures used by tutors in selecting successful applicants for retraining courses. As might be expected, the criteria employed varied with each course and the proclivities of the individual tutor. The organisation of the selection procedure also varied from course to course and this seemed, in part, to relate to the level of course, the resources that were available and the staff preferences.

The Small Building Business Course was advertised either in the 'Sun' or 'Mirror' newspapers, and tutors were satisfied with the calibre of response they got from both these newspapers. They were chosen because they both had large circulations and were probably the newspapers most frequently read on building sites. On building sites newspapers are generally passed around and read by more than one person.

(Interview: 30 September, 1986)

During recruitment interviews for this course, tutors and Manpower Services Commission representatives were looking mainly to see whether interviewees had the basic physical requisites to go into business e.g. finance, storage yard, transport and a background in building. Interviewers then attempted to elicit whether the individual had the commitment and perseverance to succeed in business. For the Small Building Business Course, tutors said they were basically looking for "a positive business idea" and "determination" and "the will to learn". (Interview: 12 September, 1986) A candidate whose application form suggested a lengthy period of inactivity due to unemployment would be looked upon less favourably than one who had found sub-contracting work, as this comment from a tutor illustrates:

"How they break out of the defeatist attitude which seems to result from being on the dole, I do not know. I am looking for winners, not losers. Top criteria is the will to be in business; to work for yourself and make a success of it; to take the knocks and get on with it and keep smiling. My father, who was in management for fifty years used to tell me look for the 'bright eyed, short haired and round toed'. And I still do. I think at interview I am looking for a person with get up and go, determination and pizazz." (ibid.)

Determination and available finance were essential since the personal allowance per student on this course was just £38 per week with £24.70 adult dependent allowance. There were no allowances given for children. Since this was a residential course, the cost of all meals and accommodation were already met and travel home each weekend was paid for. This was the standard allowance paid to adult trainees on other MSC-funded courses, plus an additional lodging allowance of £40 per week, depending on whether the trainee lived away from home.

Experienced tradesmen were preferred and the tutor felt that the best small businessmen were often experienced tradesmen who were not "academically so bright". (Ibid.) Although he admitted that well qualified people did well on the course, the course tutor felt they did not necessarily make good businessmen. He referred to the necessity of having the appropriate practical knowledge, although he could not define the exact quality he sought at interview:

"I personally assess them during the seminar night, not verbally. But quite strongly. I am looking for . . . I don't know really . . . I can't put it into words. But having worked for twenty-five years among businessmen you can recognise them. It is down here somewhere. [points to his abdomen]. I weigh them up, assess their attitude at seminar. The guy from Wales who did not take his place on the course, he was going asleep on the front row, he was not a bit interested. Most of them sat on the edge of their seats, listening and keen. The guys who bombard you with questions are good." (Ibid.)

Tutors placed strong emphasis on self-presentation at interview, neatness of appearance, although the quality of presentation on application forms seemed less important than the content, as the course tutor explained:

"I think we have had disgustingly filled in forms and when the guy has got in front of us he has been a cracking small businessman. I think the forms give you a loose guide. I suppose that is why we go for basic criteria and at interview look at the man. To read too much into the application form is wrong." (Ibid.)

Tutors were concerned to limit the size of the group to twelve, which enabled an eight to one student/staff ratio to operate. This allowed for a drop out rate of two per course on average and for students to be given individual tuition where needed.

The residential nature of the course meant that a group character quickly developed, but isolation from family and uncertainty about the future put the individual under considerable stress. In the course of selection interviews, the tutors scrutinised candidates for evidence of alcohol-based problems, and although sympathetic towards

any personal difficulties a student may experience, were quick to point out which types of behaviour would not be tolerated. As this tutor explained to candidates at the precourse seminar:

"It is a serious business and it can be a frightening situation. You will be very worried, I imagine, as you go through the course as to whether you are going to succeed. That is natural. We are here to support you and we will support you 100 per cent. The only thing we won't tolerate is people not putting their back into it and getting drunk. And that is my other role if you like, the "bum kicker". I have to sort that out."
(Tutor speaking at precourse seminar: 15 April, 1986)

Interviews for the Small Building Business Course were the most elaborate of all the courses. They were carried out over two days and began in the evening of the first day. The teaching centre where the course was normally held was forty miles from the main college and was used for the interviews. Candidates were offered, free of charge, meals and overnight stay at the centre, which also provided full board accommodation for trainees during the course. The evening began with dinner, followed by a forty minute seminar in which several members of staff and a senior representative from the local Manpower Services Commission office spoke to the candidates. Questions and discussion were encouraged. Interviews took place the following day with each candidate being interviewed for approximately twenty minutes by one of two interviewing panels consisting of two members of staff and a Manpower Services Commission representative. By lunchtime that day candidates had been informed as to whether they had been successful in securing a place on the course.

The Building Site Managers' Course advertisement for the September 1986 intake was placed in the "Sun" by the MSC, and elicited seventy-nine enquiries, of which twenty resulted in completed and returned application forms. However, the quality of the applicants was unsatisfactory and the department paid for an additional advertisement in the "Birmingham Post" and the "Northern Daily Mirror". The interview procedure was

less elaborate than the above and consisted of a twenty minute interview with an interviewing panel composed of two tutors, including the course tutor and a representative from the local MSC office. At the interview the tutors placed personal appearance and enthusiasm at the top of their list of desirable attributes for candidates, once other criteria were met. Applicants had to be over the age of twenty-five with at least two years' experience in the building industry above trade chargehand level.

The course tutor was looking for commitment to complete the course and this potential commitment could be measured by looking at the individual's current commitments, as the course tutor explained:

"I would sooner have a man who has got commitments. Fight shy of a man in his fifties with no responsibilities or commitments, because as the going gets tough they generally give in. Perhaps this is unfair - it is a hard course to get through. Got to be absolutely motivated to succeed. Strains of living away from home and on the pittance paid by the MSC causes a lot of strain." (Interview: 6 March, 1986)

The Estimator/Surveyors' Course was also advertised in the "Sun" newspaper but tutors set stricter standards on candidates' prior academic achievements than for the other two courses. Students must have achieved 'O' level or its equivalent in mathematics and english, had at least three year's experience in the building industry and be 21 years of age or older at the commencement of the course. The course tutor was concerned to achieve a good age balance on his course, as were the other tutors. He aimed to have about two or three students over thirty-five years of age, although he admitted that the younger people generally got the better jobs. Age was sometimes a barrier to selection if the interviewers felt older candidates to be inflexible.

Broadly speaking, the age range within each of the courses that were studied was therefore dependent upon a combination of tutors' selection criteria at interview and the

career opportunities a course offered. Those courses which led to management level employment attracted and recruited a wider age range than the courses offering technician or trainee level employment. This seemed to be because the latter type of employment was often perceived as a "stepping stone" to further advancement rather than offering the final career destination. The tutors' selection criteria was based on fitting people into jobs as well as into workable course groups, but also on mobility; and the younger recruits were generally the more geographically mobile.

The interview procedure consisted of a short written test covering basic mathematics and questions on electrical and electronic theory which were of an elementary nature. This was followed by two talks one by the Dean of Faculty and one by a tutor outlining the course and introducing applicants to the college. A representative from the local MSC office then gave a brief explanation of training allowances and methods of payment and claiming expenses. The applicants, fully armed with basic information about the course, were then interviewed by one of two interviewing panels. Interviewing panels were composed of one or two members of staff and a representative from the local Manpower Services Commission office.

As with the Building Site Managers' Course the department chose to pay for a second course advertisement themselves in order to attract a wider selection of candidates.

As the course tutor explained:

"I know that we advertised in the national press. We by-passed the MSC because I have a feeling that the MSC were only prepared to advertise locally; therefore we would not be competing with other MSC regions. We found we could not get enough applicants doing it that way." (Ibid.)

For the Wood Trades Course prospective candidates were directed to the college by the local Job Centre and one tutor was appointed responsible for interviewing

applicants and conducting a simple spatial and reasoning test. Generally ten to twelve successful candidates were selected from 30-40 applicants. The quality of applicant varied, although for the particular course studied, the standard was high. The basic criteria for selection were that they must be able to pass the simple practical test and, in the words of a tutor, "have some experience in the building industry and interest in woodworking". (Interview: 5 January, 1987)

For all the courses, tutors were looking for relevant experience and competence in the appropriate industry be it building or electrical work. Also self presentation, commitment and enthusiasm were important. Although this next point applies to all of the courses, it was especially apparent during observation of interviewing for the Systems Engineering Course. There was a clear determination on the part of tutors to ensure that candidates were directed to courses which best met their needs and there was a desire to select individuals who would best benefit from the course, and who would benefit the course and institution.

THE RETRAINING EXPERIENCE IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Most of these students were living away from home. With the exception of the Wood Trades Course, the catchment area was nationwide. This meant living in rented accommodation, sharing houses and flats and living in boarding houses. The responses of students to these circumstances varied, and some, but only a few, welcomed the opportunity to get away from home as a relief from domestic issues for a few days each week. For most, however, this was an added burden. Where the

budget would accommodate it, there were long and tedious train journeys home each weekend and family members were missed. Perhaps the biggest problem was finance. Although officials from the local Manpower Services Commission office declared that trainees should be no worse off financially than they would be receiving social security, as might be expected, the allowances barely stretched to meet needs.

Adults have a wealth of experience upon which to draw in dealing with each new situation that arises. Being in the classroom as students was not a new experience for them but it may well have been an unfamiliar experience. All of the students were capable of reflection, of providing explanations for their actions in the past and their behaviour during retraining.

In common with any group of students irrespective of age, the ability range within the groups studied could vary considerably. Generally, the students themselves were clearly cognisant of their own and their fellow students' abilities, and capable of fitting themselves into some sort of hierarchy of ability which was usually devoid of any connotations of worth. Having made that statement, incidents were observed where the injection of competition either by tutors or students themselves resulted in aggressive responses towards other students, towards staff and the teaching material, when the struggle to achieve academically seemed to be faltering.

Only a few students, one or two in each group, appeared to be struggling academically. With the exception of the mathematics course and one or two other courses discussed in previous sections, students felt they could call upon the tutors for extra tuition if needed. Often students related current difficulties to what they regarded as failure at school or unfamiliarity with the learning situation, as a forty year old student who had just completed the Building Site Managers' Course explained:

"I experienced difficulty in getting back into the classroom. That was the biggest worry but you find it easier as you go along because your brain does start working again If I could not have done it I would have 'jacked it in'. I had thought of 'jacking it in' just because I was bored with it. There was nothing else coming up so I stayed. If I had been offered a job I would most probably have gone." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

Another student, in his late twenties, on the Systems Engineering Course had similar experiences:

"I did not do right well at school. I was all right in the subjects I enjoyed which were anything to do with my hands I found it hard at the beginning of this course, some things are covered too quickly and other things are taking time." (Interview: 13 October, 1987)

Not all of these comments are from older students. Many of the individuals in their early twenties found the going tough, especially with the Systems Engineering Course where the pace seemed particularly fast:

"I think the course is good but it is going too fast. They are trying to squeeze two years into one. You are learning something one day and working on something else the next day, it would be better to go over it again. It goes in one ear and out the other." (Interview: 30 September, 1987)

There were individuals on the Building Site Managers' and Small Building Business Courses who found that their course lacked the stimulus and rigour that they had expected. Some of these remarks came from students who displayed a lot of confidence, while in other cases they were based on faulty impressions gained principally at interview, as illustrated by the following comment from a student on the Building Site Managers' Course:

"The other people on the course are not what I expected from the interview. I was nervous on the first day. I thought I would be out of my depth. I looked around and thought I bet they are all builders. We introduced ourselves and I realised he is a scaffolder and he is from engineering. Some are bricklayers. I thought perhaps I am not out of my depth and I gained more confidence straight away. I think we are all on level par." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

An Estimating student had gained the same misleading impression:

"I expected the others to be high fliers but you soon realise they are just like you. I thought they would be high fliers because they were looking for white collar work." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Although this next student did not find the course mentally demanding, he experienced some problems in adapting to a different rhythm of work compared to full-time employment:

"The course has come up to my expectations so far . . . It came as a shock in terms of the slackness of everything. Tea breaks here, there and everywhere. You can see the reason for it. As far as the hours are concerned I have been working less hours. Not quite so hard. It is almost like a holiday. The mental process has been hard. I have gone home mentally shattered. It has been a strain getting back into thinking routine again." (Interview: 6 October, 1987)

Tutors were well aware of the difficulties faced by students, but they too were under pressures to complete the course within the specified time and to cater for all levels of abilities. Ages of students could vary between twenty and fifty-five years of age, so there was a variation in level of experience and expertise at craft level and well as distance from education. In generalising, tutors suggested that the younger students were more academically able, although this disparity often evened itself out by the end of the course, as the course tutor for the Small Building Business Course explained:

"I think at the end of the day the group we have got now, you can split them in two halves in the classroom although not socially. A fairly bright group academically, and a fairly low academic group. It is working all right. You always get that. You always get one or two who are maths-wise pretty good, and those over forty-five tend to be a little slow. But they gradually build up as the course progresses. It is because they have not studied for thirty years." (Interview: 1 May, 1986)

The degree to which tutors were prepared to help students who fell behind varied and those courses whose selection procedure depended less on proven academic ability namely the Small Building Business Course, the Building Site Managers Course and the Joinery Course appeared to have an individual tuition element built into them to different degrees. The tutor for the Small Building Business Course explained that he tried to make it clear to students before they enrolled on the course that they would be under pressure, and he repeated the warning during the first two weeks of the course. Nevertheless he still expected to lose at least one student every course because the pace was too fast for them. Other tutors remarked that students were slow to come forward when they had problems.

At interview tutors and the Manpower Services Commission representatives were keen to ascertain the level of support which spouses were likely to provide to trainees, both financially and morally; and this was particularly relevant with Small Building Business recruits, where spouses might also be employed in the business. Often wives provided unpaid secretarial assistance. Parents of the younger students could also be a source of support. The tutor acknowledged this and observed evidence during follow-up visits to students' homes and new businesses after completion of the course:

"Funny enough, the wives bring them up. The wives seem to take the problems on board, and in some cases the wife does the running of the business. Geoff Davis's wife knew exactly where she was going with his business. In the majority of cases the wives are very much involved. Even parents with the single ones. Which is not a bad thing. It means they have some support." (Interview: 12 September, 1986)

This same spouse could also be a source of despair for her husband who was a keen pigeon fancier. When asked whether living away from home had led to any problems he replied:

"No, not really . . . except she killed one of my pigeons! She closed the door on it. It was one of my best ones. I had only just bought the bloody thing. This one was worth 40 pounds . . . I was over in Belgium

at the beginning of the year and brought it back with me and it was one of them she had to kill. I went off my head of course, but it was a mistake." (Interview: 13 May 1986)

Motivation was not a problem with the older students and the students generally welcomed the discipline even though some of the younger students took pleasure in flouting it. With those courses teaching management skills and with the Joinery Course, students were sitting at their desks or at their work benches fifteen to twenty minutes before the start of each lesson.

STUDENT INTERACTION

A further tactic of tutors to motivate students was to introduce competition into the classroom by having students work in groups on projects and have groups report back to the whole class. Students on the Building Site Managers Course were also asked to give individual presentations to the class both prepared and unprepared to build up confidence. This also accentuated the competitive element in the course. Tutors who used this technique liked to encourage competition. Despite comments made earlier in this chapter regarding a hierarchy of ability, observation suggested competitiveness to be relatively strong amongst some students and this sometimes manifested itself in aggressive behaviour and lapses in discipline.

I observed students struggling competitively with other members of the group and struggling with themselves and in each case aggression was the primary emotion. These classes were all male and I noticed some swearing but of a fairly mild nature, although I was informed it could and did get worse. Aggressive banter between

students and between students and members of staff was allied to students being presented with new ideas or concepts which proved difficult to grasp. At times, with the most boisterous group, there was a continuous loud and frantic dialogue between one or other of the students as they attempted to confirm their understanding of a new principle or ensure they had a complete copy of notes and diagrams. Then there was the student who, in seeking attention, subjected the tutors to a barrage of questions, claiming constantly and loudly that he did not understand. He reiterated these claims in interview and was concerned to inform me that his background in mechanical engineering put him at a disadvantage. His nuisance rating was high and he got only cursory attention from some tutors. It was clear from talking to tutors that this student was capable, but he chose this particular method of coping.

Conflict was deliberately introduced into the Building Site Manager's Course by the tutor in simulated practice and to inject realism into the classroom situation. He described why he used group work in management training in the following way:

"Group work is used to get them [the students] to understand working in teams, although they are encouraged to work as individuals because they will be individuals as managers. They have got to be able to follow before they can lead. I insist on competition between groups because it puts the edge into their work, which they are going to need outside, and also gives them pride in their work. I purposely set one group against another and say you are the best. I am only kidding but it makes them try harder. By switching groups around you also find out who the weaker ones are. Generally groups exclude him and they do not want a weak one in their group. No one would work with Andrew In a group of 12 some are going to be better at some things than others and we say you can all be masters of your own thing. The idea of group work is to share knowledge and this will happen on site. You have to recognise that people are masters of their particular trade and use them to solve problems." (Interview: 12 June, 1987)

Students who were members of the group taught by this tutor noted the techniques used by the tutor to introduce competition and the effect this had on the group. The ill feeling this generated was magnified as a result of unsatisfactory treatment some of

the group had experienced on site placement, which was a mandatory part of the course. The following comment offers the best description of the situation:

"The best quality work came from Jim, Jonathan and Frank. At one point Frank and Jim tended to pick on Jonathan and that corresponded with coming back off site placements when morale was down and there was a lack of cohesiveness in the group. . . . It is like everything else you have to get on with blokes and knock a piece off each other. . . . There was some small amount of friction to do with marking when one group got more than another group. Especially on the safety. But the marking seemed to be very odd. It was more competitive. I have seen it done on site where they place two groups of blokes off against each other for competition to get the building pushed up." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

This "knocking a piece off each other" referred to in the above quotation was also manifest in the leg pulling which went on almost constantly with one group who were particularly disparate in their backgrounds and abilities. As one of the students explained, it served an equalising function, a sort of counteraction to the competition imposed by the course:

"If you bring someone down, it stops them getting out of line. If someone starts taking the lead all the time you bring them in line with a little comment, it keeps everyone the same." (Interview: 2 July, 1986)

One of the tasks of the tutors during selection interviews, was to build up a group of individuals who would work together with the minimum of disruption. All tutors, with the exception of one, paid considerable attention to this. When an individual proved to be disruptive, verbal warnings were issued and advice was proffered. A tutor described how other students within the group put pressure on errant members to conform:

"At interview what we do look for is trouble and disruption. Even at the seminar this particular individual, O'Grady was trouble. Clive nudged me and winked and I spotted him. He would disrupt the group the lesson and everything. He came on the course and the group rejected him. He tried to influence everyone on the course into his way of thinking for the first fortnight, and people tended to sway his way. Then suddenly people began to reject what he was saying." (Interview: 12 September, 1986)

Sometimes competitive resentment amongst the students simmered unnoticed and erupted suddenly. For example in the evening of the penultimate day of one of the shorter courses, after several drinks in a local public house, a fight broke out between two of the students. The fight was supposedly over a local woman who had been involved with one of the men. The tutor explained the disruption by reference to the pressure the course had imposed upon these individuals. One of them had found himself in a position where he was forced to compete with two younger and better qualified men. His struggle and the resentment he felt was translated into the type of conflict with which he could cope:

"There are only three things they can fall out over, girls, beer and money. Probably [it] was seething throughout the course. Came to a head. Although it does not show itself you do get quite a bit of conflict. Any group of people who are complete strangers. . . they do form themselves up into little social groups. At the end of the course I just take that with a pinch of salt. Nobody was hurt, no damage was done." (Interview: 12 September, 1986)

Stories such as this represent only one aspect of student interaction. There was also evidence of camaraderie and of friendships developing, although few thought the friendships would last beyond the course. Despite the competitive atmosphere there was plenty of what one student referred to as "cross fertilisation", although the degree to which this occurred depended upon encouragement by the tutor, as a young student on the Small Building Business Course complained:

"I thought we might have learned more from each other. He did not give us much of a chance to learn from each other's experience. That is the teacher's fault." (Interview: 7 January, 1987)

The encouragement of "cross fertilisation" was very much a matter of degree and appropriateness and this tutor explained his preference not to use group work or encourage a high degree of interaction within the classroom as follows:

"They gain a lot from one another, by chatting out of the classroom. There is a lot in the course they have got to do themselves and no one else can do it for them. I don't encourage group work because they are on their own afterwards and they might as well learn to do it on their own now." (Interview: 10 June, 1987)

The pattern appeared to be that if a student was struggling over a course problem he would not necessarily approach the tutor first. This was something to do with saving face, as a student on the Estimating course explained:

"The teaching is pretty good, but they tend to accept that you know a lot of things. You ask somebody else in the class if you don't know because of the range of experience. You might ask the staff but not at first because you are a bit embarrassed." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Some of the problems in the classroom are a reflection of personal problems and staff are frequently involved in counselling over practical and family problems often caused by the separation from home as a course tutor pointed out:

"Counselling is fairly important. With a poor group you need to have half an hour private individual counselling session . . . this is a good group but you still get one or two problems. Family problems, wife problems, domestic Nearly all problems are because of the strain of them being separated and getting their single status back in a town. A lot of them let their hair down during the week. If they have a weak marriage when they come on the course this seems to be the finishing touch. This is why at interview I ask if they are supported by their family and wife in coming on the course. If she is for it then it is going to help him through a difficult time." (Interview: 12 September, 1986)

The failure rate was low to non-existent for all the courses, except for the Systems Engineering course which was examined. The majority of students could, therefore, be assured of a useful qualification. However, there was some disillusionment and concern, especially as the courses drew to a close and employment had not been secured; or as the course work became progressively more difficult and effort and sacrifice was weighed against the eventual gains.

CONFIDENCE

Although the qualification was the major goal, a majority of those students I was able to interview at the close of their course saw a growing confidence in themselves and their ability as an important achievement. It should be noted that possession of the certificate of qualification enhanced confidence since it confirmed achievement of a certain standard of competence; and was a universally accepted yardstick, as this student explained:

"I have always wanted to get a qualification because I think they are essential because they give you a baseline to work from; and whether you like it or not they can make a difference between you getting employment and not getting it. It is also a psychological thing. You feel that if you have got qualifications and you have done courses - that puts you on a level with other chaps." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

Confidence was expressed in many different forms. With the Wood Trades Course for example confidence was gained from the satisfaction of producing a quality piece of work, as a tutor explained:

"I think one or two of them, particularly youngsters, are very nervous. They seem very unsure of themselves. I do not know whether it is the way they have been treated at school. They make a few mistakes and they think it is the end of the world. It does not matter to us. The thing that matters in the end is that they get something out of the course and I tell them this at the beginning. They all express great satisfaction at the end of the course." (Interview: 8 June, 1987)

For the small businessmen, confidence meant understanding the mysterious world of bookkeeping and contractual and employment law and of knowing that the big step they were about to take in setting up a business was backed up by solid knowledge. This comment from a student in his mid-thirties who was enrolled on the small business course, makes this clear:

"I have wanted to go into business for a long time but I have always been afraid that I could not handle the business side of it. I could handle the actual building side, but I have never actually been on the financial side of it It is just the fear . . . I have never borrowed money and I think the greatest fear is believing in yourself, then you can borrow money, that is the way I look at it." (Interview: 3 July, 1986)

For the Building Site Managers it was feeling confident they could do the job, understand all the aspects of the job, had a basic understanding of the work of other people on site, and had the confidence to make decisions and give instructions based on a solid foundation of knowledge. To instill confidence was the conscious and stated aim of the course tutor and the students readily picked this up:

"Before I came I could not see myself as a site manager. But Clive has given us . . . on the second day of the course it hit me that I could be a site manager. It was nothing he said in particular, it was the way he was speaking to us. As if we were site managers. He makes you believe you are and gives you confidence." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

It was basically about having confidence in one's own abilities, as one student explained enigmatically:

"I think the course has given me a little bit more confidence. It confirmed what I already suspected, that a lot of people are not as clever as they make out. That I am personally probably as good or better than a lot of people - most people. I have done all this sort of thing before at college, although then you did not usually mix for such a long time with lecturers and other different tradesmen who are a cross section of people on site." (Interview: 9 March, 1987)

This particular student demonstrated quiet serene confidence in his own ability and indeed proved to be very competent. During interview he presented a balanced and thoughtful critique of the course and the teaching and yet his attitude to the inadequacies of the course was resigned and detached. In contrast, the cryptic message concealed in the above comment reveals much about himself as an individual,

about the course and the experience of being an adult student on a retraining course in a college of further education.

CONCLUSION

The student quoted above was already a confident and mature adult when he joined the course, although he admits to having gained a boost to his confidence through having completed the course. As this chapter has shown, motives for retraining are varied, and may be complex. The circumstances of an individual's personal life or sudden changes in his or her employment situation can lead the individual to look to retraining as a solution to a particular dilemma. Although motives may have varied expectations were fairly uniform. In choosing to retrain these individuals believed they were availing themselves of the opportunity to acquire skills which might guarantee them secure employment. The teaching staff, however, were concerned to impart more than merely physical or mental skills. They wished to develop particular attitudes in the students. Attitudes which would enable them to be successful in their chosen careers. Even in selecting candidates for the courses teachers placed emphasis on the right attitudes. Neatness of appearance was judged to be one of the manifestations of the right sort of attitude, as was someone who already had commitments.

With the appropriate entry attitudes the individual made a more hard working student, who would successfully complete the course. During the course tutors reinforced those attitudes which were deemed desirable, such as punctuality and other work disciplines, and gradually developed others which would equip the students to carry out a

particular job of work. This is particularly true for those students who intended to move into managerial or white collar jobs after completing training. Chapter 10 examines the ways in which most students took up these new attitudes which they believed would enable them to be successful in their new career in a highly conscious and instrumental fashion.

These attitudes were, however, general competencies. They were designed to equip the student well for employment generally or within a particular occupation. This type of training contrasts sharply with the training requirements of industry. Requirements which appear to be much more enterprise specific.

N O T E S

¹ See: Scase and Goffee, who in their study of self-employed craftsmen, attribute the decision to become self-employed to perceived: "threats to . . . working autonomy, to the growing encroachment of managerial\employer control, and to 'interference' in the exercise of . . . craft skills." (Richard Scase and Roger Goffee, "Traditional Petty Bourgeois Attitudes: The Case of Self-employed Craftsmen", Sociological Review, 29:4 (1981) 729.)

PART THREE

INDUSTRY

CHAPTER 6

RETRAINING POLICY AND INDUSTRY

"The British tradition of vocational training of workers by their employers is almost nonexistent. British industrial and commercial management have generally been supremely indifferent to training, to say nothing of retraining, and have stubbornly resisted any change in this even under the pressure of the technological advances of recent years. This is recognized in the comparative study of vocational training in Japan, West Germany, USA and UK recently published by the MSC and the National Economic Development Office (Competence and Competition, [Manpower Services Commission, 1984]). The outstanding facts emerging from this study are that those in power and those with influence in the most highly industrialized capitalist countries believe that high expenditure on education and training is vital both to national economic prosperity and to the success of individuals and corporations. In the UK they do not." (Robinson, 1986, p. 126)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter, like Chapters 2 and 3 is concerned with national training and retraining policy. The focus in this case is on policy as it relates directly to training and retraining within industry.

The above comment from Eric Robinson is taken as a starting point for this chapter and is challenged. The statement is not, however, challenged in its entirety, rather it is suggested that some modification is necessary because it would be incorrect to suggest that all employers fail to train or retrain their workforces. Some do; and part of the purpose of this chapter is to show the way in which concerns and preoccupations in policy statements with regard to training and retraining, are taken up and articulated by employers and trainers in industry.

Industry, along with the public sector education system, has long borne the burden of accusations of failure to educate and train in sufficient numbers and to a required standard. However, in recent years attention has focused more squarely on industry than before, as government moves in favour of a market-oriented approach to training provision. Industry's supposed failure to train suggests an appropriate government response, yet recent policy change shows government continues to withdraw itself from the training arena. Also, as suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, placing responsibility and some control of training more firmly with the employer could lead to the further education colleges being pushed further and further to the margins of training provision.

The question which needs to be asked is whether employer-provided training, that is training which takes place within the workplace and under the terms and conditions

specified by the employer, is the appropriate solution. Employers, it seems, do not always know what their long term training requirements are. They may not be committed to the principle of retraining as opposed to recruitment and may not be prepared to make facilities available for training and retraining purposes. There is also the danger that employer-led training will be narrowly-focused and highly specific. From the employer's point of view, and in the short term, such narrowly-focused training may appear an adequate and attractive solution. However, from the point of view of the employee, and in the long term view, this is barely sufficient.

The chapter begins by drawing attention to the link between education/training and national prosperity reiterated by successive governments since the mid-19th century, and the way in which evidence to support this link has appeared in official reports and other literature. The aim has been to draw the attention of employers to their responsibilities in retraining the workforce. A summary of the major features of some of the reports follows. The chapter continues with an examination of the position of employers in the training network to elicit, in general terms, and with an emphasis on adult training, employers' involvement in training and how that training is generally funded. Further supporting evidence is presented in Chapter 8 to illustrate the circumstances under which employers will retrain their workforce.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND NATIONAL PROSPERITY

THE REPORTS

After the Great Exhibition of 1851 it became clear to politicians and industrialists alike that industrial hegemony was no longer Britain's prerogative.¹ (Perry, 1976, p. 30) This concern focused in on the education system and in particular technical education, and its preceived failure to meet the needs of the economy.² However, since the early 1980s a series of reports and articles in newspapers and periodicals have served to emphasise the close relationship between training and profitability and to make international comparisons to demonstrate that Britain lags behind other industrialised nations in providing technical education and training.³

Several reports have been published bemoaning the miserable level of training and retraining that takes place in Britain and suggesting how the situation might be rectified. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all reports to date, but rather a representative sample from which general conclusions may be drawn.

The first of these, "Competence and Competition" was prepared by the Institute of Manpower Studies at Sussex University for the National Economic Development Council and the Manpower Services Commission, and was published in May 1984. (Manpower Services Commission, May 1984)

The report compared training in the three most industrialised nations in the world, Japan, USA and West Germany, with training in the United Kingdom and concluded that Britain compared unfavourably with these major trading nations. Its stocks of qualified workers were lower than in these other nations, and Britain was seen to be in danger of falling further behind because of what the report refered to as "deep-rooted

problems".⁴ (Ibid., p. 11)

The report discussed the narrow basis of many vocational courses and the way in which premature and speculative educational choices can limit occupational mobility. It also emphasised attitudes as much as technical knowledge. For example the report stated that training objectives such as team work, flexibility and the desire to learn are made explicit within education and training in Japan, West Germany and the United States, whereas in the United Kingdom these are regarded as 'personal qualities' rather than competencies which can be acquired through training. (Ibid., p. 13)

The report goes on to suggest that the solution does not lie in increased government involvement, instead the responsibility must lie with employers and individuals:

"A major feature of all three countries is that, although each has a very different system, all parties to the ET [Education and Training] system are much clearer about their respective roles in making the system effective. . . . the common theme in all three, compared to expectations in the UK, is that government takes a less direct role, employers' responsibilities are more readily accepted, and - an unexpected research finding - the proactive role expected of (and by) the individual (and, in some areas, his trade union) is disproportionately high." (Ibid., p. 14)

The following paragraph of this summary report stated that in all three countries studied, the contribution from the state was proportionately lower than it was in the UK, although during the recession of the late seventies and early eighties government investment in training did not suffer cutbacks.

In summary, the report proposed that public expenditure on education and training should be maintained, but that expenditure by employers and individuals should be increased. The onus was thus placed on individuals, and on employers as individual companies or as part of a group of organised employers, to take the lead, to dictate

their requirements and set training standards. To remain competitive, the report stated, employers need to develop within their workforces entrepreneurial attitudes towards their work and towards training. (Ibid., p. 15) Some responsibility was allocated to trade unions and colleges in ensuring that the requirements of the labour market are satisfied and to individuals in ensuring that ". . . their desire for learning is relevant to their employment roles."

This report reinforced some of the principles embodied in the New Training Initiative (Employment, Department of, December 1981) and reemphasised in the 1984 White Paper "Training for Jobs" (Employment, Department of, January 1984). In situating training within the context of competitiveness and economic growth, the report underlined the government's attempts to encourage employers to treat training and retraining as investments in the future profitability of their organisations; to regard investment in human resources as they would investment in plant and machinery.

In 1985 a further report was commissioned by the Manpower Services Commission in Partnership with the National Economic Development Office and carried out by Coopers and Lybrand Associates. (Coopers and Lybrand Associates, 1985) This report made no international comparisons but confined itself to examining employer attitudes to training. Its conclusions were however in similar vein to those of Competence and Competition. Research indicated that few employers linked training directly with competitiveness and profitability, (IFF Research Ltd., June 1985) and although managers believed that Britain generally under-trained its workforce, they did not believe that their own company should train more. Top managers lacked knowledge of how training within their own companies compared with home and overseas competitors and how much their own company spent on training. In addition, training

costs were viewed as overheads rather than as investment or 'a means to better achievement of corporate objectives'. (Education and Training, February, 1986, p. 34)

The major recommendations made by the report included an Individual Training Credit fund to which employers and individuals would contribute and which would be spent on training; the development of a National Award for Training and the development of a qualifications structure based on standards of competency. The final two recommendations were implemented but to date there is no concrete evidence that the establishment of a Training Credit fund is being considered.

Up until 1985 information detailing the level of investment in retraining by UK companies was not available in a readily accessible form. In this year two reports were published, the first by the Industrial Society and the second carried out by IFF Research Ltd for the MSC, both attempted to fill this gap. (Industrial Society, 1985; IFF Research, June, 1985)

The first of these reports, compiled from the results of 600 simple questionnaires despatched to personnel directors and training officers in private and public sector organisations, discovered that 66.4 per cent of respondents invested less than 0.5 per cent of annual turnover in training. Only 1.5 per cent of the sample spent more than 3 per cent of annual turnover on training. This, the report concluded compared unfavourably with training investment in the USA, France, Germany and Japan. (Desmons, June, 1985, p. 39)

The second study, concerned with the retraining of adults only, was compiled from 500 telephone interviews carried out with senior managers responsible for training in private sector establishments. Some of these interviews lasted an hour or more. The study

found that with few exceptions management were strongly in favour of training adults; and that private sector establishments with over twenty-five employees spent a total of £2 billion a year on training adults. This amounted to 0.15 per cent of turnover or £20,000 per establishment. Smaller establishments (those with less than twenty-five employees) tended to train less. (IFF Research, June, 1985, p. 8)

It is difficult to make comparisons between these two reports because the first report covered public as well as private sector establishments and the method by which training expenditure is measured would in all probability vary, since training costs are difficult to assess, and given the problems inherent in measuring a trainee's productive contribution whilst training, especially for on-the-job training. (Deloitte Haskins and Sells, November, 1987, p. 6) It was estimated that wages and associated labour costs made up about 75 per cent of total training costs. (Times Educational Supplement, 5 August 1988, p. 8)

As an attempt to encourage greater participation in adult training the report came to an appropriate conclusion that "high business performance was strongly and positively associated with a high level of adult training", although the authors were quick to counteract any criticism of methodology by stating that there was no evidence of a direct causal relationship between business performance and training activity. (IFF Research Ltd., June, 1985, p. 14)

Similar conclusions were reached by Deloitte Haskins and Sells who also carried out a survey for the MSC. This most recent survey of spending on training within the UK was due to be published at the end of 1988 but was not available at the time of writing. However, the Consultation Document which preceded the report was available (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987) and some early research findings were released to

the press in August of 1988. The enquiry consisted of six studies and the aim was to identify where Government intervention was needed. The largest of the six studies was described by the Commission as "the most ambitious survey of employers' training activities ever undertaken in Britain", and was based on a sample of 1,700 firms. (Times Educational Supplement, 5 August, 1988, p. 8)

The major findings of the report point to a previous underestimation of the amount of money spent on vocational education and training in Britain (£25 billion as opposed to £13.5 billion). £15 billion is accounted for by employer spending and this was discovered to be three times greater than the original government estimate made in November 1987 in the preliminary report. The report stated that most training occurred in industry rather than colleges or other training organisations, and the lower paid receive less training than those in better paid jobs.

Taking each sector in turn the report showed that about one-third of employees in private manufacturing received training compared with 50 per cent in the private service sector and 60 per cent in the public sector. Professional and managerial staff received more training than skilled and semi-skilled workers, 56 per cent as opposed to 48 per cent received training. Overall one third of adult workers had not experienced training during their working lives.

The report reached other interesting conclusions, namely that less than one third of companies studied had a training plan. Approximately two thirds of companies did not have a training budget. Further evidence is provided by Amin who found that the
the firms taking part in his study had only partial
knowledge of the training provision available through external agencies. (Rajan, 1985, p. 6)

These last three mentioned reports do show, as stated earlier, that employers train as a response to skill shortages and to increase their competitiveness. Cost was not seen as a major consideration, although the report from the MSC's own researchers is critical of the short-term planning in response to immediate training requirements. Amin suggested that this "training for 'needs' rather than 'stock' could exacerbate skill shortages, as what he foresees as the economic recovery accelerates. Other contributory factors were a "contraction in apprenticeship intake" and the "decay of potential stock of skills amongst the unemployed". (Ibid., p. 6)

This information is not presented for the purpose of making any direct comparisons between the result of the various surveys since 1983, but merely to show that surveys of this type have been a preoccupation of government and employers organisations throughout the 1980s, and to provide a general picture of the level of training and retraining within companies in the U.K.⁵ The conclusion that emerges suggests that despite exhortations from various quarters, British employers were not training enough. This was despite the increase in spending on training and retraining. This conclusion is arrived at by virtue of the fact that criticisms levelled in 1988 almost reproduce those advanced four years earlier.

Another conclusion that can be gathered from reading these reports is that some employers do train. It was generally the smaller employers, who operated on a smaller profit margin and who were less likely to plan for the long term, who did not train. Those who did train played a role in the wider network of users and providers which includes educational establishments, private training organisations, the Training Agency and employers themselves.

THE TRAINING NETWORK AND EMPLOYERS

With the exception of apprenticeships, training in industry may be either on-the-job, off-the-job or in-house. Both in-house and on-the-job training are generally provided by the company itself whilst off-the-job training may well take place within a further education establishment or perhaps provided by a private training organisation. Employers may also act as private providers offering training for which a fee may be charged to individuals or organisations. Except for YTS, some provision within further education which has been subsidized, and training grants which have been available through the MSC, employers bear the full cost of training their employees. (Deloitte Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 6)

As major users of vocational and educational training provided elsewhere in the system, employers form part of a complex network of organisations with whom they interact:

"These interactions include relationships with sectoral bodies like the Industry Training Organisations (ITO's) and with the education sector as in the College Employer Links Project (CELP), representation on college governing bodies and more recently with the Local Employer Networks (LENS) initiative. Finally, they also influence the development of the vocational education and training (VET) system through their membership of representative bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Association of British Chambers of Commerce (ABCC)." (Ibid., p. 6)

This same Consultation Document, quoted above, suggests that most training at operative level was done on the job with some block or day release where the services provided by further education or private training agencies were utilised. As the skill content of the job increased, a greater use of off-the job training was noted, "with

greater use being made of knowledge-based as opposed to skills-based training. . . "
(Ibid., p. 7)

In addition, because the smaller companies were likely to lack specialised training departments, they were more dependent on outside training sources.

The lack of adequate training facilities on site has not been a major reason why companies have failed to retrain. A great deal rests on the perceptions of the employer and the degree to which the employer can envisage training as the solution to a problem. Unfortunately there has been a tendency to use training to ameliorate an existing need rather than as an element in future corporate planning. Technological and procedural change may be introduced, with retraining to accommodate these changes, planned as an afterthought, as this quote demonstrates:

"Planning and training was short notice. We knew that training needed to be done when the decision was made to change the plant, although training was not planned at the same time as changes in technology were planned. . . . We did not have a long term plan for training, we planned as we went along and tried to use as much as possible of our own people." (Interview with training manager: 19 September, 1986)

The evidence to date suggests that firms have been unlikely to invest in training which exceeded their own short-term needs and related to specific skills. As Rainbird points out, this is therefore a policy area in which there has been a history of state intervention geared to meet the long term needs of the economy, for example the 1964 Industrial Training Act which established the Industrial Training Boards was a response to the skill shortages of the 1960s. (Rainbird, 1985, p. vii; Rainbird and Grant, 1985, p. 93)

Secondly, under economic pressure the training budget will probably be the first to be cut, possibly because the returns from training have been unpredictable and not immediately apparent. This absence of immediate feedback led one training manager, interviewed during this research, to describe training as "an act of faith". Another described this tendency to cut back on training first as "one of the real sins of British industry - unless you can quantify it, I am not paying". He went on to explain that:

"When you [a training manager] have split responsibilities the training thing goes. It is in the very nature of things which need preparation time and planning, that we fall into the traditional sins of middle management, and we deal with the fire fighting instead." (Interview: 15 September, 1987)

These two points were summed up by the Director of a Training Consortium which took as its catchment area a major portion of the geographical area covered by this study. He believed that the standard of training in this area was good and was in sufficient supply, but the problem lay with employers and a lack of demand:

"I do not know why employers are not coming forward. We have done the mail shot and we just do not seem to get the response, particularly the smaller and medium sized companies. They do not see the need. Training for them is, if we get some new equipment we had better get someone trained in how to use it. Business is tight, profit margins are tight and nobody really plans ahead. The bigger companies, yes, they are more progressive. Even the bigger companies, some of them slowed their training down once the spur of the training boards was taken away. A lot of them got rid of their training managers. They cannot see the correlation between training and improved productivity and profit. It is not possible to see and measure the value of training. Everybody agrees that a company that trains will do better, they are in the top quartile. Nobody has come up with a formula which says that if you invest x amount in training this gives you x amount of profit." (Interview: 30 March, 1987)

Finally, Deloitte Haskins and Sells make the important observation that training expenditure is normally treated as a revenue item rather than capital investment. This is because much of training expenditure has consisted of labour and material costs as well as some overheads including plant, machinery and buildings. Overheads account

for anywhere between 3 per cent and 10 per cent of training costs. Employers will therefore seek to recover such costs through income from sales or training grants. The report asks whether:

" . . . expenditure on VET [should] be treated as a revenue item to be recovered within the financial year, as a longer term capital investment, or both? Do employees regard expenditure on VET as a long term investment?" (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, 1987, p. 11)

This suggests that some adjustment to standard accounting practice, and possibly even tax incentives on capital investments, might serve to force employers to shift training costs to another accounting head. On the plus side, it is clear that some employers have regarded their workforce as capital assets which are "renewable through retraining".⁶ (Helfgott, 1988, p. 68)

Despite the comment by Deloitte, Haskins and Sells relating to employers' tendency to regard training as a revenue item, this same report shows that cost has been a subsidiary consideration when employers seek to retrain. Some companies do take advantage of the training grants, although they only go part of the way to covering costs.

One of the companies who participated in this research study used MSC grants for computer design, and upgrading electricians and inspectors, although these grants represented only a minor portion of the finance necessary for retraining. This company also claimed funds from the Engineering Industry Training Board (EITB) and the European Social Fund. The Training Manager said it was training they would have done anyway but that, as with any investment, the company looks to outside resources. For example if they were installing a new boiler in the plant they would talk to the Department of Energy to elicit which grants were available. When asked why he

thought industry did not always take advantage of the training grants which were available he explained that it was rather like:

"... old people not asking for money. Perhaps they have not the knowledge we have. In a department like this, a large department, we have the expertise and the knowledge you cannot have in a two or three-man business. Grants cover only part of the costs and a small company cannot always make up the rest of the cost of retraining. We take the view that we have to do the training and if there are any external funds available - let us have them. I would like to think that we have a reasonably professional outfit here and the MSC has not persuaded us to retrain. They do not knock on our doors." (Interview: 19 January, 1987)

Another company who were retraining twenty craftsmen in multi-skills took advantage of an MSC grant, although, like the previous company the grant was not an incentive to retrain:

"I think retraining can be viable with a grant from the MSC. You can just about cover the cost of the external charges within the grant. Our main cost will be the cost of the overtime required. Our grant will go into a general pool, but it will pay off the external training What it won't pay is profits lost during the eighteen weeks whilst we retrain. We will have to make up production by having people working overtime. This could be of the order of ten to fifteen thousand pounds. We are getting a maximum grant, which is one thousand pounds per trainee. We are including leading hands, supervision, training and instruction techniques. A total of twenty-two people. We would have to go ahead anyway with or without the grant, but whether we would have gone ahead so quickly I do not know." (Interview with manager: 15 September, 1987)

In the long run retraining is cheaper than recruitment; and long established employees possess the knowledge and experience of company procedures and products, with which even the most zealous of new recruits would fail to compete. A report conducted in 1985 which examined the recruitment effects of technical change, indicated retraining was generally preferred by employers to recruitment as a means of satisfying skill shortages. Where recruitment did occur it was "primarily replacement rather than incremental." (Rajan, 1985, p. 5)

It is worth mentioning also that management often referred to the obligations the company has to retain and retrain the existing workforce. Employers in the study by Rajan, cited above, chose to retrain rather than recruit because of what they viewed as a responsibility to existing staff, along with the fact that the change in skill requirement was relatively small. He describes how retraining, along with recruitment, has been used, not only to achieve "greater flexibility", but also to facilitate "redeployment and orderly reductions in headcount". (Ibid., p. 5) However, in times of real financial constraint and cutback it is doubtful whether such issues would take priority.

Training also serves to improve employer/employee relationships. The company is seen to be investing in the workforce and the workers recognise a new confidence in the company which is retraining for the future. The reverse could equally be true, that news of impending change including retraining can cause unease and fear especially amongst older workers. However, a report carried out by the Electronics Economic Development Council (EDC) Employment and Technology Task force suggests that, many British companies failed to consult or involve their workforce when planning the introduction of new technology: ⁷

"... the willingness to adapt to change is facilitated by greater involvement of employees in the planning and development of the business, enabling better understanding and informed decision making.

While there is no legal requirement on companies in the UK to provide industrial or commercial information to employees in all circumstances, improvements witnessed in industrial relations among those firms that both inform and consult is a strong argument in its favour." (National Economic Development Council, 1983(a), p. 4)

So lack of detailed information is more likely to be the cause of reluctance and fear than the prospect of retraining.

CONCLUSION

There are two major issues which emerge from the literature and official reports outlined in this chapter. The first is that training is viewed as a panacea for the country's industrial ills, and the second concerns the appropriate role for industry in training and retraining workers.

To take the first point, the idea of training as a panacea serves to simplify economic problems and thus suggests a straight forward solution, or at least presents the problem as amenable to solution. It also lays the blame with another party or parties, thus directing attention away from the need for direct state intervention in the economy.

The blame, in this instance, is directed towards industry and education. More latterly the focus has been on industry as government attempts to privatise training. Through privatisation the government can not only shift the burden of costs for training and retraining from the state to industry, but this policy is also in line with its stated aim of reducing state intervention in the economy.

The second issue concerns an appropriate role for industry in training and retraining workers. Although "Competence and Competition" pointed to less government involvement in West Germany, Japan and the USA, it should be born in mind that historical and contemporary circumstances in those countries differ from those which prevail in Britain. It would be wrong to suggest that a system developed in another

society could be simply grafted on to whatever exists in Britain. Furthermore such systems which may be the object of envy in Britain do not necessarily operate in the best interests of all workers in the countries concerned.

It is clear from the evidence presented in this chapter that not all employers were either willing or able to train or retrain. Exhortation and persuasion produced limited improvement, and those who retrained were likely to do so anyway without the aid of government grants. Those employers who did retrain did so because they understood its value and because they could absorb the expenditure and temporary loss of output that often occurred. However, even those who did retrain, may not have given it priority. Training may have been an "afterthought", an extra detail to be sorted out after the new machinery had been installed or a new system put into operation.

The material presented in the following two chapters demonstrates that there are circumstances under which employers understand the necessity of retraining. The companies discussed here are amongst those who do retrain. Alongside the development of YTS training courses for young people there has been a sharp falling off in apprenticeship training and none of these companies had large apprenticeship programs. Whilst there is contraction in this area, once a company installs new technology or chooses to multi-skill its workforce, then the requirement for retraining becomes compelling. This is the type of training discussed in the following two chapters.

NOTES

¹ The result was widespread concern over the competence and ability of the workforce to power an economy which was facing increasing competition from Germany and France.

² Successive governments have made attempts to mould the education system to achieve a closer fit between that and the requirements of the economy. With the exception of the Industrial Training Boards established with the passing of the Industrial Training Act of 1974, industry's role in training and retraining has been voluntary.

³ All this shifts the focus slightly towards employers and their responsibility to train and is designed to increase the awareness of British management to the value of training and retraining.

⁴ For example in Japan and USA, 17 per cent and 19 per cent of the population respectively are first degree graduates compared to 7 per cent in the United Kingdom; and in West Germany and the United States 66 per cent and 78 per cent of the population respectively have a recognised vocational qualification, compared with an estimated 33 per cent in the U.K. (Manpower Services Commission/National Economic Development Council, Competence and Competition: Summary of Significant Features of the Report, (Brighton: Institute of Manpower Studies, May 1984).)

⁵ Comparisons are made, however, where methodology allows. It is worth stating that any attempt to make direct comparisons between these reports is fraught with problems since the methods of calculating training costs and so on vary considerably from one report to the other.

⁶ See also a survey carried out by IFF Research Ltd. for the Manpower Services Commission. The report states that:

" . . . British managers are strongly of the opinion that when change means that new skills are needed, they would tend to retrain existing staff - 84% choose this option - rather than recruit skilled staff (12%) or recruit unskilled staff and training them (7%)." (IFF Research Ltd., Adult Training in Britain (Sheffield: Manpower Services Commission, June 1985) p. 6.)

However, the statement is tempered by the fact that of those companies who trained, only 51% of them trained for new skills. 84% retrained to update existing skills.

⁷ See also: Heavy Electrical Machinery EDC/NEDC, Skills and Technology: The Framework for Change (London: NEDC 1983).

C H A P T E R 7

T H R E E C H E M I C A L C O M P A N I E S

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The previous chapter was designed to give a general overview of training policy and its impact on the retraining of adult workers which takes place in British industry. This chapter confines itself to discussing three companies selected because they were all undergoing some form of restructuring and they exemplified some of the trends which have occurred in industry with regard to the selection and retraining of adult employees. These trends should be seen in the context of changing patterns of industrial relations which involve the signing of single union agreements and the shift towards multi-skilled workforces. Selection and retraining procedures carry with them different implications for workers in the context of the introduction of these more flexible working practices.

The argument of this chapter is that training plays an integral part in the drive towards modernisation in the context of enterprise restructuring. First, it imparts new skills, thus prepares the workforce for technological change and new methods of working; and

second it forms part of a new approach to labour-management relations. Along with quality circles and harmonisation of conditions of employment, training can be seen as a means of boosting an employee's commitment to the company, and increasing his/her confidence in the company as an employer. It serves as an indication to the worker that the company is prepared to invest in him/her as a valuable employee. Nonetheless this is a form of enterprise training and does not necessarily prepare the employee for a variety of employment situations, as is the premise of public education.

The first stage of the research involved making contact by post with twelve companies engaged in chemical manufacture, oil refining, rubber manufacture and engineering (a number of which were engaged in high tech engineering). Of the initial sample, five responded by offering the opportunity to speak with their training/personnel people, and two said they were unable to help for various reasons. Of the companies which were visited, over a period of eighteen months, three proved exceptionally interesting and they subsequently permitted interviews with trade union representatives and a number of individuals who had retrained, or were undergoing retraining. These three companies are the focus of this chapter.

During the final stages of the research those companies who did not co-operate with the research initially were contacted again by means of a brief postal questionnaire, to elicit some indication of how and to what extent companies were retraining adult employees. This information, together with data collected via interviews, is summarised in Appendix 4.

The focus was on three of these companies only, in the hope that a more detailed study would throw light on the ways in which employers gain the cooperation of their workforce. One of the ways they did this was through retraining. This contrasts

sharply with the adult job retraining that occurs in colleges of further education. The colleges operate with a different remit. Their aim is to prepare individuals for employment and, some would argue, for life generally, by imparting the necessary skills. Alongside this, certain affective skills which would be beneficial in enabling the individual to operate effectively in a particular job are taught. These do not necessarily form part of the written syllabus but are implicit in teaching methods and techniques. Employers, however, have a narrower objective. This is to maintain and improve the profitability of a single enterprise, and they can better achieve this by gaining greater cooperation from the workforce. Workers can cooperate more effectively if they have the skills appropriate to the job, but their contribution can be enhanced further if they are committed to the enterprise, and retraining is part of the process through which this commitment is achieved.

A second methodological point should be noted, namely that because companies such as the three discussed in this chapter were undergoing transformation in terms of the relationships between management and employees, certain processes become more visible. Thus, change throws into clearer focus aspects of training and retraining which might otherwise be obscured by an emphasis on tradition and practice.¹

THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY

As stated earlier the three companies upon which the research focused were all within the chemical industry. Rainbird and Grant describe the industry as capital intensive (Rainbird and Grant, p. 33) and maintaining high levels of investment, particularly into

research and development of new products. Indeed, research and development is important in terms of international competition which is intensive. Chemical plant is expensive and the materials that are processed are potentially dangerous; it is essential therefore that the workforce are well trained. (Rainbird and Grant, 1985, p. 40)

Using data published in 1981 Rainbird and Grant report that production in the chemical industry was concentrated in a few leading firms. For example the seven companies who were responsible for over 50 per cent of gross output of basic industrial chemicals in 1982, provided almost fifty per cent of employment. (Business Monitor, 1985, quoted in Rainbird and Grant, 1985, p. 33) The largest chemical company in Britain, Imperial Chemical Industries produced around 35 per cent of the nation's chemical output (Hardman, 1981, quoted in Rainbird and Grant, 1985, p. 33) Indeed, shares of at least two of the companies in this study were partly or wholly-owned by Imperial Chemical Industries Limited.

Over-capacity in certain sectors, and the high price of oil-based materials and high energy costs, appeared to be the major difficulties facing the chemical industry. (Rainbird and Grant, 1985, p. 33) To some extent this over-capacity may be linked to European food surpluses and the shift to less chemically-dependent farming methods and pressure from environmental groups. Nevertheless, as Rainbird and Grant point out, although profits may have slumped during the recession, chemical companies still made a positive contribution to the balance of payments. This amounted to £1.6 billion in 1983. (Ibid., p. 33)

Rainbird and Grant note major changes in the structure of employment in the chemical industry and types of skills employers require:

“ . . . the breaking down of trade union restrictions on the demarcation of skills and the allocation of jobs was the first step towards introducing

multi-skilling, as opposed to single-skilling, and in increasing the flexibility and mobility of the workforce." (Ibid., p. 95)

All three of the companies studied were moving towards a multi-skilled workforce, either in whole or part, and two of the companies sought to destroy what they perceived as trade union restrictions in an effort to achieve more flexible use of their labour force. This was not, however, the case with the first of these companies, Crowtree Chemicals.

THE COMPANIES

CROWTREE CHEMICAL COMPANY²

The first company, Crowtree Chemicals, was part of a much larger conglomerate and was, by the admission of members of the management team, losing money fairly heavily as a consequence of what they referred to as the depressed state of the fertiliser business. A general state of over-capacity and a resultant price war also meant that the prices their products could command on the market were too low. They were therefore looking to bring down production costs by improving plant efficiency, which implied looking at manpower costs.

The company had not yet introduced computer controlled equipment into the plant, except in a small way for bagging the chemicals. Management were not sure whether the cost of introducing the new technology could be justified at that particular time. They were of the opinion, however, that the introduction of the new electronic equipment, with built in program logic controllers, to replace the existing pneumatic

instruments, would involve upgrading skills and that the maintenance of such equipment was outside the competence of traditional single-skilled instrument mechanics who had been trained on pneumatic machinery.

Relations between management and unions appeared to be reasonable, although I was unable to speak to shop stewards outside of the earshot of management to confirm this. Management described the situation as "not too acrimonious", but that the trade unions tended to represent what they termed the "traditional view point". (Interview: 15 September, 1986)

It was also felt that the geographical location of the plant and the type of jobs that were available in the area had some bearing upon trade union strength and militancy. The official Department of Employment unemployment figure for the parliamentary constituency in which the plant was situated was 5 per cent higher than the national average at around 16 per cent in February of 1987. (Unemployment Unit, March/April, 1987). Until the 1960s and early 70s much of the population found employment in the extractive industries of fishing and farming, which were traditionally not well organised in terms of trade unionism. Being a largely rural area there were still some vestiges of feudal relationships between landowners and agricultural workers, which made unionism more difficult than usual.

Management felt the reaction of the workforce to the plan to multi-skill difficult to gauge, except for a degree of apprehension amongst the craftsmen. In contrast, they reported a very strong and positive reaction from the trade unions representing the craftsmen, namely the AEU and the EETPU:

"When I talked about the training leading to EITB qualifications and additional training schemes the reaction was very strong." (Interview: 15 September, 1986)

Indeed, some single skills had already disappeared from the plant. For example, the company no longer employed single-skilled ladders, joiners, bricklayers or riggers, and as a shop steward pointed out:

"Demarcation barriers are an old fashioned thing now. . . . All those trades have gone and will not be replaced by this company in the foreseeable future; and there will never be that sort of training in those particular trades here. The majority of trade unions are for multi-skilling. It is only because of the economic climate . . . the new realism. . . . [then turning to the three members of management present at the interview he said] . . . If conditions had been different you never would have been able to introduce this." (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

It was difficult to judge whether the reaction of this particular shop steward was typical of the workforce, although the other shop steward indicated that whilst some workers relished the idea of becoming multi-skilled, there was still a built-in resistance. (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

The planned multi-skilling was not, however, intended to affect the whole of the workforce at the plant. The total labour force was around 150, 40 of whom were monthly paid staff. Of the remaining weekly paid shop floor employees, only 27 were tradesmen. These, along with supervisors and engineers, formed the maintenance department. The management plan was to multi-skill the tradesmen whilst reducing their number by seven. Of course, management recognised that it was: "Bad news to link redundancies with multi-skilling." (Interview with manager: 15 September, 1986)

They were also concerned to be seen to be dealing fairly with the workforce:

". . . it is a rotten thing for the people concerned. You want to handle it properly and try to do the whole thing in a decent way." (Ibid.)

The sensitivity of the issue was further exaggerated when management and the unions concerned disagreed on the manner to be adopted in selecting those who would retain their employment and undergo retraining. At the time of my first visit to the plant unions and management had reached deadlock and the matter was to be passed to the Chemical Industries Association³ Headquarters Conference for arbitration which would involve senior trade union officials and CIA industrial relations staff:

"You need to pick the best possible people, those who you feel will cope well with retraining; can cope with going back to the classroom for a period. So we are after the right kind of selection test and management appraisal package to choose which twenty go through. That is causing trouble. There is a very strong feeling [amongst the maintenance workers] that it is far less invidious to have last in first out." (Ibid.)

At the time of the second visit to the plant those individuals who were to be retrained had been selected. I was unable to discern exactly what the pronouncements of the CIA Headquarters Conference had actually been, but the outcome was that individuals were selected for retraining according to management criteria. The shop stewards explained to me their concern over management's selection procedures:

"We wanted the long established union procedure - last in first out. There was one or two reasonably competent tradesmen that were going to be put out of work on this assessment routine in deference to other people with junior service. That was the strong suspicion. The end result was that the company got their own way." (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

Originally the criteria for selection were to include an aptitude test along with a management panel assessment of an individual's likely performance in a variety of areas, e.g. attitude to working overtime and response to call outs. Length of service, performance on the job, sickness, absence and disciplinary records were also to be examined. However, the selection process had to be modified in the light of employee response, as a manager pointed out to me:

"We got intense and emotional opposition to the whole idea of selection testing. The older ones felt it was a long time since they were at school and having to pit their wits against the youngsters. . . . I am a good worker, but I will come off badly doing things on paper. We have had to drop the idea of written selection testing on the grounds that the group disliked it.

"I think people will be basically worried about putting pencil to paper. A lot of people on the shop floor level are scared out of their wits at the thought of it. I have given talk after talk and counselled people but they are still frightened." (Interview: 15 September, 1986)

It was principally the older employees who were concerned about that aptitude test, although management stressed that age was not important in selecting people for retraining.

The test was eventually dropped from the selection procedure and introduced later to provide information that could be used in the retraining. There was some dispute between trade union representatives and management at a group interview I carried out in July of 1987, with the shop stewards contending that the test had been referred to as an 'ability' rather than 'aptitude' test. This seemed to support some of the fears I was picking up which were expressed by older workers that they were being judged and tested rather than assessed.

Before the redundancies were eventually announced volunteers were requested, and two were forthcoming, including one who was near retirement. Once the "attractive arrangements for pay in lieu of notice" (Interview with manager: 7 July, 1987) were announced a further two volunteered to leave. The remaining three who were given notice were working on temporary contracts at the time of my final interview and were due to leave at the end of the month. At this final interview in July with shop stewards and three members of management a member of the management team explained that:

"The ones who went voluntarily - things are Okay for them - they all have good jobs. Out of the three that are still with us, they all feel bitter about it to varying degrees. More against the situation of loss-making and the need to cut back. They are well thought of inside the workshop and people feel bad that people of that calibre are being chucked out.

"It was not a case of clearing out the dead wood. It was a good group to start with, it was a rotten business and good people are leaving. People felt bad about the redundancies." (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

As the manager was speaking everyone around the table nodded agreement, and a shop steward added: "Somebody had to go I suppose!" (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

It was clear that there was common agreement over the undesirability of redundancies, although they seemed to accept that it was a bitter pill which had to be swallowed. This is not to say, however, that the shop stewards were ready to concede anything to management which was against their better judgement, and I was given the impression that management, for the most part, were prepared to consider contributions from the trade unionists. The group interview on the occasion of my final visit to the plant was a particularly lively affair, with the shop stewards openly challenging management. For their part, management defended some decisions and readily accepted that they had been responsible for some errors of judgement, as for example in their decision to award the contract for the off-the-job element in the retraining programme to a local private training organisation.

The training programme for these new multi-skilled maintenance craftsmen consisted of 18 weeks' intensive retraining. Six weeks in the classroom at the training organisation and 12 weeks on site, using chargehands already on site as specialist skill trainers. These individuals would already have completed EITB instructor courses. The six weeks off-the-job element would be split into two three-week blocks, and

management acknowledged that trainees would be under extreme pressure for all of the time.

However, the selection of this particular private training organisation proved to be a mistake. The response of the trainees was not as the management had anticipated. As one shop steward neatly put it: "There was open anarchy over the training programme". (Ibid.) On another occasion the same shop steward described it as: " . . . a bloody balls up". (Ibid.)

It was clear the situation had to be reassessed, as a member of the management team explained:

"We used [*****] Training Organisation who were not used to working with mature adults. Their trainers must have been rejects from outside industry who wanted an easy life bossing young lads about. Eventually they lost control of the trainees.

"I pitched in hard with [*****], and they improved their approach.

"We had problems on our side trying to take mature people back to school. We used the EITB segmented approach where you are doing a crash version of the apprenticeship and a lot of that involves written work using logbooks. Some trainees were a bit short on writing skills and tried to camouflage that by being difficult and awkward about the whole business of training.

"Things were allowed to continue for a week or two until I had to get hold of things and gave them [the training organisation] an eyeball to eyeball talking to saying lets get on with it or you withdraw from the training." (Telephone interview: June, 1987)

It seemed that the expertise of the private training organisation lay principally with the training of young people on the MSC's Youth Training Scheme, and they proved themselves ill-equipped to teach adults who could be critical and were prepared to ask questions. The situation was further exacerbated since these adults were also coping with the difficulties of learning once again, and of reacquiring writing skills after an

absence of some years from education. As with the mature students in the further education college, their frustration over the legitimate difficulties they had with the learning material were translated into opposition towards, in this instance, the trainers. In addition, it was universally acknowledged that the training facilities at the organisation were inadequate, and there was general agreement amongst management that the training organisation had oversold their capabilities and could not deliver the training required.

The situation with this company differed from the other two examples in that it was a smaller company and this appeared to be reflected in the less formalised relationships between management and unions. With Close and Thorney and the Wellpenny Chemical Company the concern was to limit trade union organisation in order to push through changes in working practices. Here management were motivated by the same imperatives to save costs and improve efficiency by multi-skilling their maintenance workers, but these issues were distilled into the single issue of the struggle between management and unions over the selection of individuals for retraining.

CLOSE AND THORNEY INDUSTRIES⁴

Close and Thorney Industries was a particularly interesting company to research given the controversial nature of the employment package management were seeking to introduce. Although much of the explanation given here may seem marginal to the issue of job retraining, it forms the background to the training issues pursued in the next chapter.

The company was part of European based multi-national organisation with a turnover of more than £5,000 million a year. In the United Kingdom the turnover was around £200 million and the company in which I researched employed 800 people. The original plant had been established in 1946 and was part of another organisation until it was taken over by the multi-national in the early 1980s. There had been little investment and the company had been operating at a deficit up until the late 1970s, although in the early 80s some rationalisation had begun and the workforce was cut by around 250. After the multi-national took control of the company the rationalisation continued.

At the time of the takeover the British plant was still realising heavy losses. There were two options open to the multi-national: the first was to close the existing plant and reinvest in a greenfield site; the second was massive investment in the existing site. They chose the latter. However, the £80 million pounds investment would only proceed provided certain conditions could be met. It was put to the workforce early in 1985 that the investment was conditional upon their acceptance of a new employment package, suggested by the Personnel Manager to be the first time that a company in the United Kingdom had chosen to implement a greenfield package on an existing "brownfield" site. They were bringing a "sunrise package to a traditional smoke stack industry." (Interview with Personnel Manager: 9 September, 1986) This package included a new grading and pay structure, a single union agreement and more flexible working patterns, of which retraining was an important element.⁵

Before looking at the way the new package was introduced some understanding of the relationship that existed between management and the unions prior to the takeover would be useful. In the thirty years or so that union had been organised on the site the shop stewards reported only one dispute lasting a week, shortly after the takeover,

and two one-day stoppages, described as "storms in a tea cup". (Interview: 24 April, 1987) The 1960s and 1970s were relatively peaceful with productivity and flexibility deals being achieved. Union membership was virtually 100 per cent despite the absence of a closed shop agreement, with 60 per cent in the TGWU, 20 per cent in the EETPU or AUEW and 20 per cent in ASTMS. There was also an unusually high number of full-time convenors - five in all for a workforce of 850.

Prior to the takeover, a centralised bargaining system had existed and union representatives were able to gain access to Board level. Thus middle management were by-passed. A regional union official described the relationship as institutionalised along the lines of the industrial relations set-up of the 1960s and 70s:

"The industrial relations department and the shop stewards complemented each other. They probably had various disagreements but that was within very definite rules. They had the procedures and worked within those. Management never challenged the rule of the shop stewards committees in the sense that they never questioned whether they were speaking for the members or not and therefore the shop stewards did not report back as well as they should have. The workers or works' management were not involved in most of the negotiations only the IR department." (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

The powerful responsibility of communicating with the workforce rested with the unions. The new package was aimed in the main at decentralising the pay and bargaining structure and re-establishing management's crucial role in the negotiation process. This had an advantage in the medium term in that the shop stewards were able to negotiate acceptable settlements and resolve grievances, but the regional official feared this might lull them into a false sense of security so that when the situation was challenged they were left isolated. (Ibid.)

It was partly this institutionalised industrial relations structure, which the new management wished to break, that ultimately worked against the shop stewards. The

structure was designed to enable negotiation to take place. However, when management did not wish to negotiate, the unions were unable to act. Although the communications system between the shop stewards and management was deemed to be effective, that between the stewards and the membership was not. The only means of communication available to them were official notice boards or mass meetings, and neither of these provided the appropriate forum by which the unions could reach and involve the membership. In a situation such as this there are endless opportunities for recrimination. A regional trade union official argued for better communications between unions and their memberships and criticised the shop stewards for focusing on the single union agreement rather than taking account of the procedural changes inherent in the new employment package which effectively marginalised the trade unions on site. (Ibid.) The shop stewards, on the other hand, felt their full-time officials could, at times, have kept them better informed. (Interview with shop stewards: 24 April, 1987)

However another reading of events would suggest that management saw a situation developing and acted to transform it to their own advantage. Alongside the dissolution of the existing collective bargaining structure management sought to introduce flexibilities into existing working practices and recognised a single union agreement as a means of easing that transition. As the Personnel Manager explained:

"In 1985 I made a recommendation and it was high risk. I said the only way is to go for a single union agreement, and that was part of the new personnel package." (Interview: 9 September, 1986)

Negotiations between the company and the trade unions faltered because the trade unions chose to adhere strictly to a 1985 TUC General Council ban on single union agreements achieved without the consent of the other unions involved. (Private sources, p. 5)

The TUC had tightened its Bridlington rules designed to prevent such agreements being reached after the EETPU reached agreement with the Hitachi Company in south Wales, which excluded the other unions at the plant. (Incomes Data Services Ltd., 1986, p. 20) However, the management at Close and Thorney chose to interpret the TUC resolution differently, and in a manner that was advantageous to themselves; as the Personnel Manager pointed out:

"The national officers interpreted that statement [the TUC resolution] to mean the prior approval of other national officers. We interpreted that statement as being the prior approval of our employees who were members of those other unions. We said if you do not come along with us we will take the whole of this package to our employees. Never before had anyone said if you don't come along with us we will take the whole of this package to our employees. In itself that was an 'eye opener'. Never before had anyone said if you don't come along with us we will then leave you on the sideline. They accused us of using all sorts of psychological pressures on our employees." (Interview: 9 September, 1986)

The first indication to the workforce of changes afoot came at the beginning of 1985 when the company issued a glossy brochure outlining the possibility of an £80 million investment, and the changes necessary to secure that investment. Following this the company began negotiations with the trade unions over the new employment package and the shift to single union recognition, whilst at the same time communicating with the workforce by letter, setting out the details of the new package. Unhappy with the company's insistence on direct communication with the workforce, the shop stewards sought a meeting with company representatives towards the end of 1985. This meeting broke up when it became clear to the trade union officials that a single union bargaining unit was a prerequisite for an agreement with the company. (Private sources, pp. 17-18)

It was at this point that management fired its winning salvo. They communicated further with the workforce by letter with appendices to the original employment package

and giving notice that employees would be expected to state their position on the new package. The individual responsibility of each worker for the future well-being of the company was emphasised in the following statement contained in the letter:

" . . . unless we have the commitment from yourselves, I do not believe we will gain the support from the parent company for the investment which is so necessary." (Ibid., p. 18)

Employees understood the implied message. This was an area of high unemployment and the closure of a plant of this size would exacerbate an already difficult employment situation.

At around the same time the unions also attempted to elicit a commitment from the workforce through a series of mass meetings, and all but a tiny minority of the 800 present at the meetings committed themselves not to agree to the package. Throughout the month of August the company communicated a number of times with the workforce in an effort to persuade them to sign, stipulating a deadline for agreement early in September. Meanwhile the trade unions implored their membership to "stand firm" (Private sources, p. 29) until they were able to bring the company back to the negotiating table. The unions were anxious to reconvene the negotiations but the company no doubt realised they held the winning hand. What is more, management were able to present their argument within the homes of their employees.

This put the unions at a disadvantage, as a shop steward pointed out:

"You must admire the company, the way they did it. It caught us with our trousers down. It was a completely new concept in industrial relations. Sending letters to people's houses. Obviously, if his wife reads the letter the individual is going to get bother from his wife." (Interview: 24 April, 1987)

Some shop stewards reported rumours which were circulating in the plant at this time which unsettled the workforce, and may have panicked many into signing. In addition

it was suggested that some managers had made threatening statements to workers implying that workers who failed to sign the employment package were obviously not concerned to retain their jobs. This was also an opportune time for the company to send letters to invite for interview individuals who had applied for jobs at the plant in the past. (Private sources, p. 21) Many of these were sons of men already employed at the plant. (Remark made by trade union official at a Conference at Northern College 27-28 March, 1987) Contrary to the company's viewpoint a union representative described the company's ten day campaign as " . . . quite intensive and vicious". (Ibid.)

By the deadline set by the company a majority of the employees had signed the postal response form and the union subsequently advised their remaining members to sign. Then, by the end of September, with the £80 million investment secured, the company claimed that 98 per cent employee support for the new package had been achieved without coercion. (Private sources, p. 21)

Under the agreement individuals could retain membership of any union of his or her choice with sole bargaining rights for all employees below the level of middle management awarded to the Transport and General workers Union. There were to be twelve part-time shop stewards, and unlike, for example the Toshiba single union agreement, union organisation would not be encouraged. (Ibid., p. 13) ⁶

The Employment package also provided for the establishment of an Advisory Council made up of six management representatives, one senior shop steward, thirteen directly elected employee representatives, plus a chairman and a secretary. The Council was designed by management to be the main channel of communication and consultation with the workforce and was to meet monthly. In addition, where local union-management negotiation failed to resolve any dispute, the matter would be referred

to the Advisory Council. So from management's point of view, the Advisory Council effectively replaced traditional trade union organisation. (Private sources, p. 14)

However, the stewards complained that the proceedings of the Council meetings were not fully reported back to the workforce, and minutes of the council meetings were not always available:

"Our records are three months out of date. We said to him [Personnel Manager] the last time there was no point in having meetings if we don't have minutes, but he bluffed his way out of that." (Interview: 24 April, 1987)

The trade union officers on site were further excluded from election to the Advisory Council through the method by which representatives were elected. The old shop stewards constituencies were organised on a shift basis whereas the Advisory Council members were to represent geographical constituencies. Shop stewards also complained that the introduction of the new 6-shift system further restricted the mobility and contact possibilities of stewards:

"Each steward will be restricted to his own constituency - therefore limiting his movement around the plant. There will be no one there to relieve us on the job to attend to union duties." (Ibid.)

For those shop stewards who remained at the plant, morale was exceedingly low, they felt impotent and thwarted at every turn. They described how the previously strong union support had dwindled:

"At branch meetings only the stewards turn up. It's like going out for a few drinks. If we are not careful our whole membership will disappear." (Ibid.)

For the stewards the new package was a "union bashing exercise":

"He [Personnel Manager] said this in a round about way. If he really wanted to get rid of us he could. . . . there must be a reason for him not destroying us completely. Whether they are going to use us as

whipping boys for the future we do not know. He is such a clever bloke that he must have thought of it." (Ibid.)

Nonetheless those stewards I interviewed felt that, given hindsight they could hardly have acted differently:

"I am not against them [single union deals] providing the union that is doing the negotiating have got proper rights to negotiate for their workers, which we have not. The single union agreement which this company is suggesting is a 'load of bull'." (Ibid.)

It seems that management was intent on removing rigid job demarcations which they felt were a handicap to improving efficiency, and employees could be expected to be directed to any job irrespective of status or function so long as the job could be carried out safely and was within the individual's competence, for example production workers carrying out first line maintenance duties. However the emphasis was on attitudinal change rather than creating the "universal" multi-skilled operative/craftsman. Clearly the company recognised that there were limits to multi-skilling in this instance, possibly because of the highly specialised skills required for work in the plant; as the Personnel Manager pointed out:

"We said we were not looking for the universal craftsman i.e. the specialist in many crafts. We recognise that there were core skills within the trades but there were other skills that were not core skills within trades. There were other skills again that we felt other people ought to possess to ease their flexibility of working arrangements on site. So when they went on site the fitter did not have to wait for a rigger to put up a 12 foot high scaffold or we could supply him with scissor lifts. We are still not looking for universal craftsmen. As far as process work is concerned we are not thinking of having a fork lift truck driver being a chemical process operator because that would not be within their capabilities. Those words come through all the time 'within his training capabilities'." (Interview: 9 September, 1986)

Some time after the employment package had been agreed by the workforce, an article in the local press reported "a radical shake-up" at the plant, with the "Virtual closure of

the old site and opening a new one". The article suggested that all 800 of the workforce were to lose their jobs and would be reappointed to new positions, possibly dependent upon the results of aptitude tests. (Article in local evening newspaper: undated - probably October, 1985) This article and another reported the loss of ninety-five jobs at the plant. However, the company thought that most of these people could be absorbed elsewhere in the plant carrying out alternative work. (Article in local business journal: October 1985) These ninety-five maintenance assistant positions were to be phased out and their function would be performed by process operators or craftsmen.

It seems that management at the plant were satisfied with the outcome of negotiations over the employment package, although shop stewards informed me that morale was low. It is difficult to say how far low morale affected the whole workforce. Certainly the two employees whom management allowed to be interviewed were either acquiescent or unconcerned with the decrease in trade union influence at the plant, as this remark from one of the employees indicates:

"The single union agreement does not concern me. You accept the way things are with the union not being strong. It is the same throughout the country." (Interview: 16 June 1987)

The Personnel Manager described this as a high risk situation and it is worth asking whether, if the company's financial position had been more favourable, management would have been prepared to challenge the unions as they did.

WELLPENNY CHEMICALS⁷

Wellpenny Chemicals was part of a larger organisation which began producing chemicals in 1934, and had plants in other parts of the world including North America, Europe, Africa and Australasia. The larger organisation chose to establish a plant in this part of Britain in 1949, because of the proximity of a nearby port for the shipment of raw materials, a plentiful supply of pure water, and a turbulent river estuary nearby for the dispersion of the effluence. It is now the largest in the group, with a capacity of 95,000 tonnes a year, and employs approximately 800 people, of which somewhere in the region of 630 are manual workers.

The company gradually expanded its production since it was first established by 800 per cent in just over thirty years, but was hit particularly badly by the recession in 1981. However, indications were that it was making a recovery and was intent on increasing general efficiency and output per worker through modernisation. Although it was the largest factory in the group, it ranked only sixth in terms of output per employee. (Interview with Personnel Manager: 20 August, 1986) Only about 20 per cent of the plant was fully automated and much of the plant was out of date and under process of modernisation. It was claimed that employees who had been displaced by automation were redeployed elsewhere in the plant. (Interviews with Personnel Manager: 20 August 1986 and 20 January 1987)

Throughout the period of the research the company was in the process of negotiating a harmonisation package with the workforce, and it was not until shortly before the final visit that it was made clear, through another source, that a deal was being negotiated. Once agreement had been reached and was in the course of being implemented,

management and shop stewards were ready to discuss the issues involved.

The details of the harmonisation package were important for three reasons. First, a condition of the agreement was the deunionisation of the plant. Second, the agreement formed the basis for the introduction of multi-skilling and more flexible patterns of working, and subsequently the conditions under which retraining was carried out. Finally, the circumstances under which agreement was reached illustrated again, as with Close and Thorney Industries, the pressures under which workers must make decisions which have repercussions for themselves and the communities in which they live.

Negotiations began in August 1985 and agreement was reached 15 months later, after regular fortnightly meetings with shop stewards. The manual unions had, since 1983, pushed for harmonisation with the staff pension arrangements but management had refused to negotiate, since the existing pension scheme was non-contributory. This time, however, management agreed to consider this suggestion, and took harmonisation several steps further by offering complete staff status to manual workers in exchange for the derecognition of trade unions within the plant. The staff had relinquished trade union representation in 1980. In summary, staff status included enhanced pension accrual backdated for full service, an early retirement pension, higher life cover, faster sick pay accrual and improved holidays. In addition each manual worker was required to sign an individual contract of employment which covered a new pay structure.

The workforce was kept informed as the negotiations progressed and a 92 per cent turnout in a secret ballot in January 1987 resulted in a 76 per cent vote in favour of accepting staff status and relinquishing trade union representation. Except for six individuals, the workforce did initially vote in favour of continuing to have trade union

dues deducted from wages, although, by July 1987 the Personnel Manager reported that about 100 people, mainly TGWU, had withdrawn their membership. (Interview: 10 July 1987)

Contact with different groups within the company made it possible to gather contrasting data on how the deal was negotiated and what it meant in the long term. For management it was another high risk situation which demanded some delicate manoeuvring and seed planting. The Personnel Manager suggested to me that it was this pressure from the workforce in favour of harmonised pension benefits which produced a situation where employees would be more receptive to deunionisation:

"I was having a discussion with the Works manager and he said how is this pressure going to build up? With the age profile it is a problem. We have a lot of long service people. He said would you be prepared to negotiate some element of pension improvements and I said no. I said I am prepared to negotiate full staff status which will include a rationalised salary structure but they will have to work flexibly as staff do and have the same representational situation where there is no trade union for collective bargaining purposes and we have individual contracts of employment." (Ibid.)

By July 1987, having successfully 'pulled-off' the deal the Personnel Manager was euphoric. If the venture had concluded in failure he was answerable both to those above and to those below him in the hierarchy:

"It was a high risk we took because the consequences of our workforce not wishing to do it would be the might of the trade unions down on our heads. It was a high personal risk for me in terms of the company having some scapegoat to appease the trade unions. I do not think our directors fully appreciated the consequences of everything falling down. . . . It was visionary in terms of the seed planting and preparing people. It crystalised into a total philosophy based upon the initial representations about pension arrangements . . . " (Ibid.)

The Personnel Manager admitted that the company had to commit a large sum of money in clinching the deal, although he did not explain exactly how this money was

spent, and a regional union official took up this point also:⁸

" . . . I understand . . . that the company clearly were prepared to put a lot of money into it, like most of these flexibility packages. . . . I think the fact that we have lost membership is bad but again the deal was so incredible in terms of money for the members' pay, etc. There is a problem in that the workforce, at Wellpenny Chemicals is a very old workforce and I think a lot of the people who voted for the scheme were looking at the money they were going to get from the enhanced pensions and profit sharing schemes." (Interview: 10 July, 1987)

Of the trade unions on site, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) were probably the most severely affected in terms of membership lost, since they represented the process workers. The other trade unions involved were the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU), the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT) and the General Municipal and Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union (GMBATU) for the maintenance craftsmen. Since the shop stewards had initially proposed some form of harmonisation with staff, they found themselves at the centre of these negotiations representing their memberships without common agreement, even within their own ranks, although the majority were in favour of the package. The Personnel Manager suggested they were under pressure from their memberships to complete the deal satisfactorily:

" . . . if they did not complete this deal satisfactorily, then they would have been lynched by our employees. A number of shop stewards resigned just prior to the ballot taking place, and I think they did that to protect themselves. The stewards had agreed with management that they would be responsible for negotiating the package and full-time union officers were kept off the site. (Ibid.)

The full-time trade union officials tried a number of approaches to involve themselves in the negotiations but the shop stewards were apparently prepared to conduct negotiations themselves, and it seems the company were determined to exclude them anyway. (Ibid.)

A pro-harmonisation electrical shop steward suggested that the trade unions' unwillingness to accept flexibility was the cause of their eventual exclusion:

"The company were willing to accept trade unions but they wanted job flexibility and the trade union said you are not getting it. I fought it to the last and I knew I was wrong. I was convinced I was going to get the sack as were the bulk of the shop stewards. And it did not happen. Instead they asked me to attend a training programme and write up a report on it." (Interview: 10 July, 1987)

This is a somewhat generalised and possibly inaccurate view. Another possibility is that the company excluded full-time officials from the negotiations because they were concerned to introduce change and new flexibility and they knew the package was attractive to their workforce. The trade unions, of course, would oppose the deal because it would, in all probability, involve a loss of membership for them. There was, however, a report in the Financial Times suggesting that the company was prepared to sign a single union agreement with the Transport and General Workers Union, but the union was not prepared to play a sufficiently active role.⁹

In the short term the deal was undoubtedly an attractive one to the workforce, although the impression was given that few gave up union recognition at the plant lightly. Even before the agreement was signed morale at the plant appeared high, compared to the 1960s and 1970s when management/union relationships were not good. The most damaging dispute involved a nine week lock out. This is the Personnel Manager's view of the dispute:

"There was one strike at the factory in 1966. Over money but went deeper, about control - shop stewards or management. . . . nine months after that event every shop steward who was involved no longer worked for this company. There were recriminations. A combination of dismissal or being forced to leave. They disagreed with employees they represented." (Interview: 20 August, 1986)

There had been an effort by management since 1981, when the company was badly hit by the recession and there were concerns over efficiency and general performance, to improve employee relationships. Quality circles, team briefings and training and retraining programme were all part of that drive. Despite the current optimism, many referred back to those times in the early 1980s when the workforce had been hit by redundancies:

"There was a redundancy exercise about seven or eight years ago. Shocking exercise. It did not affect the workforce as a whole as much as the clerical side. A lot of them were given a minute's notice. It affected managers and senior superintendents. At a later date they went out of their way to redress that mistake. When redundancies had to be made on the shop floor it was a voluntary exercise and pay was good. The office staff were not unionised at this time." (Interview with shop steward: 10 July, 1987)

This perhaps should have served as a warning to the workforce when considering the dangers of relinquishing union representation. Instead this same person presented me with a before and after picture of shop floor attitudes. He described a cartoon produced by a talented shop floor artist:

"[He] drew a cartoon of someone clocking in with a notice saying leave your brains here; and the title was 'Roll on 4 o'clock'. This was sent round the shop floor and everyone said yes that is the game. This same man has now produced a new drawing to say that is how I feel now. A man is wheeling a barrow containing skills, ideas, thoughts, attitudes, projects, involvement and morale. He [the artist] is unable to express himself in words. The whole attitude of him and whole workforce has begun to change. We want to see everything better because people are beginning to identify that the future is going to be with one company for the rest of their lifetime and we have to get involved with it." (Ibid.)

It was suggested that there were some personal enticements directed at the shop stewards, some of them accepting promotion to supervisor level at the conclusion of negotiations. (Private sources) This could not be fully substantiated, although a shop steward who was an enthusiastic supporter of the new package had recently been

promoted. Caution should, however, be exercised in assuming that this was such an example. Indeed, this individual gave the impression that he was still struggling within himself over the ethical arguments of abandoning trade union representation at the plant. The interview took place shortly after a national election and this shop steward had been a staunch Labour supporter all of his life, yet when he reached the polling booth he turned back, unable to bring himself to vote for any party.

As a shop steward he was described to me by management as "more flexible and sensible than many shop stewards", and he had developed his own pragmatic approach to trade unionism. An approach he felt was more in keeping with the circumstances of today:

" . . . in the past . . . the trade unions and employers were two different sides. I think what we have to do is appreciate that this is not the case, although it might have been a number of years ago with a floating employment market. In that situation people never had an alliance with the company they worked for. They only had it with the union because that was the only solid point in the working environment for employees.

"The current situation . . . particularly in the chemical industry, is that tradesmen will join a company at the age of sixteen and probably retire with the same company. We have therefore to look for a new relationship. One with the trade union because it is from there we get a lot of protection in times when we need it, but also the relationship with the company - that is important because it is going to pay your wage and it is going to train you in the skills which you require in the future." (Interview with shop steward: 20 January, 1987)

Craftsmen and operatives on the shop floor expressed that same inner conflict between lifelong values and the necessities of survival:

"It bothers me. You do not want to be left behind. If your job is stable you are OK. A lot of us are still members of the trade union. It is just recognition within the factory. It will still be them and us whether you have staff status or not." (Interview 1: 7 July 1987)

"I voted against it, so I suppose the answer is negative. It is the only way forward. . . . the whole agreement was so open ended that you did not know what you were letting yourself in for and we are still much that way." (Interview 2: 7 July 1987)

Only one person I spoke to was visibly upset, a craftsman in his late 50s: "It's over now, it has been done and that is that." (Interview 3: 7 July 1987) These words ended the interview and he left abruptly.

Events at Wellpenny serve to illustrate several points. The first is an effective mobilisation of consent in that the management were able to strike a deal with the workforce that appeared advantageous to both sides. For the workforce, it offered considerable improvement in their terms and conditions of employment and management were able to secure co-operation for changes in working practices.

The second point was well expressed by a shop steward who suggested that economic circumstances now forced workers to shift their primary allegiance from the trade union to the company. The manner in which the facts are presented to workers suggests that only the company, provided it continues to make a profit, was capable of supplying the job security that workers need; and the workers were, in part, responsible for their own security through their efforts on behalf of the company. Thus capital and workers are bound together.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the workforce was wholly in favour of the agreement. However, for the mass of individuals who occupied the middle ground, although reluctant to accept deunionisation, the outcome must never have been in question. With a weakened trade union movement, the company was the key to the future of their community and their own jobs; and skills and expertise were an integral part of that security. For full-time workers with dependents and other responsibilities those skills are more readily obtained through the employer.

CONCLUSION

This study of events at these three companies represents a reassessment and reevaluation of training within the context of enterprise restructuring. In the drive to remain competitive the company needs to update its plant and machinery and update the skills of the workers in order that they may operate this plant and machinery efficiently. But more than this, training is a means of securing and retaining the co-operation of the workforce, of gaining commitment and encouraging involvement and identification with the company. All of which, these three companies were concerned to achieve.

In the case of Wellpenny Chemicals, the new jobs package was designed not only to improve employee benefits but also to lower the retirement age and therefore enable the company to reduce its workforce. There were, however, increased pension benefits so that those retiring earlier may not be disadvantaged. Thus the company secured the commitment of the workforce for the future. Furthermore, it may be that commitment and rapid change can be secured more effectively if trade union strength can be diluted or by-passed completely.

Wellpenny Chemicals was not primarily concerned to alter the attitudes and behaviour of their workforce, except perhaps in encouraging workers to identify with the organisation. This seemed to be happening anyway as a result of changes in the management of the plant that had been implemented earlier. Indeed the move to

harmonisation of conditions was only possible because efficiency had already improved at the plant, and the company attributed this in part to better relations and closer co-operation between management and workers. A greater investment by the company and increased involvement by employees in training and retraining programmes was seen as partly responsible for improved relations as well as forming the basis for the move to staff status.

For Close and Thorney, however, the need to engineer a change in attitudes was of paramount importance and was allied to attempts to marginalise the trade unions on site. Clearly management was concerned to bring about a fundamental change in attitudes and culture as well as working practices and the collective bargaining structure.

In contrast, management at Crowtree demonstrated no desire to alter the collective bargaining arrangements which existed within the factory. The level of change which was required was pushed through using the negotiation structure which already existed. Unlike the other two companies the threat of job loss allied with the need to maintain profitability seem to have been sufficient as a lever for change.

This chapter has provided the background to the circumstances under which retraining took place within three companies in the chemical industry; subsequent chapters will examine the retraining process from the point of view of management and workers and how it functions as an element in the drive to maintain profitability.

NOTES

¹ See also: the work of Liston Pope and Alvin Gouldner.

Pope explores the relationship between the owners of the cotton mills and the church in a number of communities in North Carolina, USA over a period of sixty years. Early in 1929 there was a series of strikes and communist uprising in the area. As a consequence of these events, seven men were convicted of murder and sentenced to prison, others escaped by emigrating to the Soviet Union. Pope is able to examine the symbiotic relationship between the religious and economic institutions in the community which was brought more sharply into focus in the face of the challenge from the communists and strikers.

Gouldner looks at the chain of events which led to a wild cat strike at a manufacturing concern. Management responded to market pressure by introducing new machinery into the plant and adopting new working practices which included closer supervision. For the workers such changes altered the existing "indulgency pattern" (Gouldner, 1954, p. 21) of industrial relations and in some cases threatened status privilege. Again it is the situation of conflict and change which enabled the existing pattern of relations to be examined in a more detailed and meaningful fashion. (Liston Pope, Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958) and Alvin Gouldner, Wild Cat Strike, (Ohio: Antioch Press, 1954).)

² I paid only two visits to this company; the first in September 1986, when I interviewed two members of the management team, and the second ten months later. For this final visit I conducted a group interview with three members of management and two shop stewards representing the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) and the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU).

³ The CIA is the principal employer organisation and trade association for the chemical industry which carries out collective bargaining on behalf of its "conforming" members. (Helen Rainbird and Wyn Grant, Employers' Associations and Training Policy, (University of Warwick: Institute for Employment Research, 1985), pp. 33-34.

⁴ I made a number of visits to the plant over 18 months, during the course of which I interviewed the Personnel Manager, the Training Manager, shop stewards and two employees undergoing retraining who were selected for me by management.

⁵ The whole package included the following:

- sole bargaining rights for the TGWU with new procedural arrangements.
- the establishment of an "advisory council" made up of management and directly elected employee representatives.

- complete flexibility and mobility of labour with an emphasis on the "team concept"
- a simplified pay structure
- moves towards harmonised conditions of employment
- three year pay deal
- a new continuous shift pattern of working
- a new disciplinary procedure."

(Private sources, pp. 12-13.)

⁶ See also "Toshiba Consumer Products (U.K.) Ltd. -New Start, New Industrial Relations", Industrial Relations Review and Report 253 (August 1981), p. 5.

⁷ During the course of the research, several visits were made to the plant when the opportunity was given to interview personnel and training management, shop stewards, and workers who were retraining or were about to undergo retraining.

⁸ An IDS study on Flexibility notes that one of the major costs associated with flexible working is improved working conditions and they cite especially the harmonisation of conditions of service between manual workers and office staff. This section of the study goes on to explain that:

"Formal harmonisation is not necessarily a feature of the most flexible firms, but generally they have terms and conditions of employment which are close together if not the same. And several major companies have gone the whole way and introduced single-status pay agreements covering the whole workforce - Continental Can from the start of its operations, Cummins Engines and Pilkingtons after negotiations."

The study concludes that the inevitable result is high labour costs compared to companies whose wage structure is more flexible. And this is particularly so for industries which suffer from severe fluctuations in demand. ("Flexibility at Work", Incomes Data Services 360 (April 1986), pp 22-24.)

⁹ Further details of this source are not given in order to protect the anonymity of the company concerned.

CHAPTER 8

ADULT JOB RETRAINING IN FOUR CHEMICAL COMPANIES AND TWO ENGINEERING COMPANIES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter locates training in terms of changes which takes place in the employment relationship when a company restructures and in the context of the pursuit of greater flexibility in the workplace. For this reason the chapter begins with an introduction to some of the literature concerning flexibility and multi-skilling. This issue is taken up again in chapter 9 where an attempt is made to assess the extent of flexibility and multi-skilling in British industry.

The following section examines the motives company management may have for retraining workers. This differs from the material presented in Chapter 6 in that it is based solely on the responses provided by management within the companies researched. The focus is on two specific issues which seemed most important to those who were interviewed: first that retraining will lead to increased efficiency, and second will help develop a more co-operative attitude and greater commitment amongst employees. Retraining is, therefore, as much about developing particular attitudes as it is about enhancing skills. It is about flexibility, about developing flexible skills and indirectly flexible attitudes. These are issues which emerged as significant for the three chemical companies in Chapter 7 and are major issues of concern for industry generally.

The section which follows looks at the way policy goals are put into practice and presents an outline of retraining provision and facilities in the companies which took part in the research. The distinction is made between training and retraining, which is a normal part of the day to day experience of employees, and training programmes which may have been introduced to satisfy particular purposes. The remainder of the section focuses on training for specific purposes, for example, preparation for the introduction of new technology or for multi-skilling.

The penultimate section attempts to ascertain, from very limited data, the criteria used in selecting employees for retraining. This is based on the assumption that if it was possible to define the model trainee from the perspective of management it would be possible to arrive at some notion of the qualities they seek in the trained worker.

The final section examines the retraining process from the point of view of the employee and worker responses to the prospect of retraining. Like the students at West Biscop,

the major motivating force for the trainees in industry was job security. Retraining was welcomed when it promised increased job security, but rejected when it threatened existing secure arrangements.

FLEXIBILITY AND MULTI-SKILLING

Flexibility may be introduced on established work sites and through existing trade union structures as well as greenfield sites, although the composition of the flexibility package will look very different under these different circumstances. So the type of company undergoing flexibility change can vary as much as the nature and extent of the change itself, as well as the procedure by which it is introduced.

Flexibility refers to a set of working arrangements where the terms and conditions of employment are not rigidly defined. Multi-skilling is only one form of flexibility.¹ The concept of multi-skilling takes on different meanings in different circumstances and this has consequences for retraining. Rainbird distinguishes between "flexibility in peripheral areas of a craft" and "multi-skilling, otherwise known as 'skill exchange' or 'third streaming'". In the latter, two complete jobs may be combined so that one individual can perform all the skills previously executed by two people for example a fitter and an electrician. (Rainbird, 1986, p. 12)

Multi-skilling as defined by Rainbird is relatively rare, and as the IDS Report No. 407 points out the idea of a "single supercraftsman" who is highly skilled in more than one area is misleading. The firms discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 sought to retrain their

employees in peripheral craft areas and not, for the present, as 'supercraftsmen'. For the purposes of this research and ease of reference however, the former will be referred to as multi-skilling. (Incomes Data Services, April, 1988, p. 1) Typical examples of multi-skilling include craftsmen who have added peripheral skills to their own core skill, for example a fitter acquiring some basic electrical knowledge. It may also mean process workers carrying out first-line maintenance duties. In some cases demarcation barriers between office and blue collar workers have been eliminated.

RETRAINING POLICY

Management decisions to retrain their workforce are frequently influenced by changes in company policy involving either the introduction of new technology or changes in working practices or both. The underlying imperative in such decision making is the need to maintain profit levels in the face of increasing competition both at home and increasingly from overseas. In addition, as members of multi-national organisations and conglomerates, they need to demonstrate to the parent company, their ability to survive as efficient and profitable partners compared to other companies in the group.

The overall aim seems to be to increase output in relation to staffing levels; and for some companies this has involved redundancies, whilst for others, the solution has been minimal recruitment and redeployment. There are two alternatives by which a company is able to operate the plant with fewer workers. The first is to increase mechanisation and/or computerisation of work. The second is to opt for multi-skilling across traditional craft boundaries to decrease manning levels and lower maintenance

costs. Some companies have aimed for complete flexibility across craft, process and office work; and although flexibility of this order was discussed minimally by at least two of the companies covered by this research, there was no evidence of such radical change as part of their immediate strategy.

There was never any attempt to deny that the goal of retraining was to increase the efficient operation of the enterprise. As one personnel manager explained to me, the company would finance training only if it could recognise benefits for the organisation as well as the individual:

"We look at the benefits as far as our business is concerned now and in the future. Whether it is awkward to release that person for training. Can we afford the course? Often if it is technological change we cannot ignore it. It would have to be relevant to their immediate job or their career." (Interview: 19 January, 1987)

There was a sense that for some managers training was linked to a new approach to labour management relations, about changing attitudes to work and as a means for improving the morale and well-being of the workforce. This, however, was to meet the needs of the organisation, as a training manager explained:

"We are looking in ten years time for a multi-skilled workforce. The lines of demarcation will be obliterated. At a low level we want people cross trained so that one man can do the work of three in future - get more flexibility. . . . There will be less frustrations for the workers, they will be able to get on with the job. There won't be redundancies but it means that we won't be employing as many people in the future, because that is one of the ways of reducing costs. . . . I think the people on the shop floor acknowledge the fact that they have to do more now than they had to do in the past. They are given a lot of responsibility. The policy in the past has always been profits, product and people. Profits came first. It has changed - now looking at people. Philosophy now is if you treat people right you will get the products. The company has always treated workers well on welfare, but more or less like numbers, but now there is a much greater awareness in the development of the people on the shop floor." (Interview: 20 August, 1986)

Taking up the same theme, another Personnel Manager described how, in the past, management treated unskilled operators as "factory fodder", and this generated unwelcome reactions from the trade unions on site.:

"If you treat people like second class citizens you get the appropriate reaction. It is cheap, but it does not really build teams. That generated in turn restrictive practices from unions, negative thinking, reluctance to change and hold on to what you have got - and we have a bit of that here. . . . If you get individualist and difficult people you run the risk of not keeping the team together. Most people most of the time are totally co-operative. It is the way they are led and it is the way things are explained to them. It is all management's fault in the end. We are trying to improve that now." (Interview: 26 August, 1986)

However, the solution of this company involved by-passing the previously utilised management-union communication networks. Senior management briefed middle management who in turn issued notices to employees. As justification for this change of policy the personnel manager used an incident some years ago when an individual was sacked. The shop stewards were given responsibility to inform the workforce and according to the Personnel Manager the version of the event passed on to the workforce was a distortion of the facts.

At another company it was explained how they were using training to boost the morale of the workforce following four years of cutbacks, retrenchment and redundancies. There was a consensus view within management that retraining was the answer; and in 1982 the company also introduced quality circles. A manager with a third company also made a strong link between training and the well being of the workforce:

"I think training is a welfare issue. It counts for a lot. It shows that they have a future with the company It is good news that the company is investing time and money for us [the workers] and at the end it will make the job more interesting." (Interview: 26th August, 1986)

What these managers are really referring to is not so much the health and welfare of their workforce but rather their commitment and co-operation. This may explain the encouragement of quality circles and teamworking which often went hand-in-hand with the retraining that accompanied changes in working practices. Alongside these, are changes in management philosophy expressed in changing attitudes towards the workforce. Even those companies who had not established quality circles were giving them consideration.

The cultivation of employee commitment and co-operation was as vital to these companies as the skills the workers brought to their jobs. Indeed they were essential if the new or expanded skills these workers possessed after retraining were to be put into practice in a way which would benefit the company. An IDS study on flexibility pointed out that:

"While the most advanced companies have of course invested considerable resources in skill training, they emphasise that the vital extra 'ingredients' in their recipe for promoting flexible working practices are in the process of recruitment; the subsequent emphasis on what is expected from employees; and the development of attitudes to quality and teamwork." (Incomes Data Services, April 1986, p. 15)

These are the principles which appeared to guide management in formulating training and retraining policy within their organisations.

RETRAINING PROVISION

A better understanding of the types of adult job retraining which took place in the firms which were visited can be gained by examining them under two categories. The first

category can be described as "ongoing", and the second as retraining for a "specific purpose". For example, training for a specific purpose might follow the introduction of new equipment or changes in working practices. These two categories are not without overlap, since it must be assumed that all training serves a specific purpose; and a training program designed to familiarise workers with new equipment may prove to be a permanent feature given a sustained level of technological advancement.

ONGOING TRAINING AND RETRAINING

Ongoing training generally takes place within the larger organisations who have well established training departments and apprenticeship schools and who often sell training courses to neighbouring companies. This applied in two of the organisations in the study, one of which employed twenty-seven staff in their training department, including the Training Manager, training officers and instructors. In 1987 they were one of the first companies to achieve Approved Training Organisation status with the MSC as trainers under the New Youth Training Scheme. As a manufacturer of high technology engineering equipment they trained around 500 people a year from other organisations in the operation of their products; and sent trainers overseas to service their considerable export market. The other company appeared equally well organised and boasted as many as eight first year apprentices from other companies in their training school in the past. This company was completing the rebuilding of their training department which had been pruned to two staff in the early 1980s when the company suffered a recession. Training was now very much more on the agenda as part of a drive to rebuild employee morale.

In the smaller companies, the training function was either split between various departments within the organisation, or had a less significant profile generally within the organisation. One firm whose company philosophy was that managers must take a positive attitude to retraining, especially day release and who were willing to pay for tertiary education during the day or in the evening, had little to offer on the premises. Their training budget had been slashed by 40 per cent that particular year and they had no training school. Trainers and trainees did, however, have access to two rooms and a certain amount of equipment, but as the Training Manager explained to me: "Other equipment must be begged or borrowed or stolen from a number of departments." (Ibid.)

This company, in concert with others, made use of expertise at the local colleges and appeared satisfied with the service they were given. Only two companies used private training agencies in developing training packages, but not always successfully. When training involved familiarisation with new equipment companies often took advantage of training offered by manufacturers.

As far as further education colleges were concerned, generally companies in the study used them when it proved cost effective to do so, and this related particularly to the availability of resources. One or two Training and Personnel Managers did express reservations about using the FE system, for example, with reference to rigidities within its structure and colleges' preoccupation with class size. This was explained in detail by one training manager:

"FE courses relate a lot to numbers. Where we can run courses more economically we do. With YTS we do all the off-the-job training ourselves. It is cost effective. Where we have the expertise and the hardware we will provide the training ourselves, but with things like mathematics or electronics education the FE college has better resources.

"It is impossible to make a direct comparison with the results from FE and from training here. There are certain things we would want to change in the colleges given the opportunity. You may be aware of the concept of time-based standards which are predominantly the picture in the engineering industry, e.g. five-year apprenticeship. The engineering industry now is generally moving towards standards-based training. Training to standards means we can reduce our training time because extraneous matter is removed and that is what we are doing here. Clearly we want FE courses to fall in line with that pattern. Most colleges operate a 38 week academic year. We are interested in the college giving us input for 48 weeks of the year . . ." (Interview: 19 January, 1987)

Outside of a general training programme which companies might operate, there were training programmes set up for specific purposes, and the data which was collected provided examples of such programmes designed to prepare employees for the introduction of computerisation and multi-skilling.

TRAINING AND RETRAINING FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY

The first example of purpose-designed training was a chemical company with a workforce of 405, who were gradually shifting from fluid logic control to computerised operation. The computer units and the new plant were installed simultaneously and were designed to process the existing product lines. The company designed training courses for the different grades of operators, supervisors and chemists and those individuals who were to work on the new equipment were taken out of the plant for one full week on a rota system over a five to six week period. Specialist trainers were brought in from outside of the company. In this way it was possible to maintain production throughout the changeover period. Process training was executed in three phases consisting first of safety training which was mainly instructional; followed second

by plant and process familiarisation; and finally by software training. Both the second and final stages included instruction and simulation.²

In other companies there were examples of training following the introduction of computer numerically controlled machines which, according to the Training Manager of an engineering company, required a considerable amount of training not only in the operation of the new technology but also new processes. Most of it was on-the-job training and lasted in some cases up to three months. For one of the chemical companies, training for process workers on computer-based equipment could last from several weeks for the lower level operators up to three or four months for a leading operator. The training schedule of a leading operator on their new nitric acid plant would include computer-based training modules designed by the company itself, five days in the classroom, two days training on process control equipment provided by the equipment suppliers, followed by six days of simulation training. There were also four classroom sessions on turbo alternators and two on turbo compressors; and because some leading operators might be expected to train new recruits they were also given instructional techniques training.

There is, however an unsettling aspect to the use of new technology in training. The computer-based training modules described above involved VDU screens placed at strategic points throughout the plant for use by employees whenever their workload slackened off. This was retraining at its most flexible; and employees would key into the VDU and work through a programmed learning sequence. Management explained that the method enabled individuals to progress at their own speed and check their level of understanding at each stage. Shop stewards, on the other hand, were concerned that management could use progress records stored by the computer to monitor employees; and this was particularly threatening since the plant was

undergoing a massive reorganisation at this time. Indeed the Training Manager explained to me that management could in fact monitor the time employees took to answer questions and the accuracy of their answers; and this information was useful for the pre- and post-session counselling sessions given by managers.

In this particular company the VDUs were used to teach workers the principles of chemical processing. It was envisaged that the process workers of the future would be capable of putting into practice basic craft skills and the workers would have a full working knowledge of the processes.

TRAINING AND RETRAINING FOR MULTI-SKILLS

With one exception, all the companies in which I conducted interviews were considering and undergoing a change to multi-skilling. To what extent the workforce were to be multi-skilled and the manner in which this was introduced was dependent upon the size and structure of each company and on economic pressures within and without the organisation. Multi-skilling is part of a move towards the more flexible use of labour resources, and equipment. Flexibility generally may include team working, the blurring of distinctions within and between blue and white collar jobs; changes in manning levels and working practices; the combining of jobs, or adding extra skills to the core skills of defined jobs.³ (Industrial Relations Review, March 1984, pp. 2-9)

One of the larger companies chose to begin in a relatively limited way working with small groups of people who, because of the nature of their work, had previously worked

flexibly; and this was where the greatest return might be concentrated. Their training programme began with a turning and cutting course for all craftsmen to be followed by a general rigging course. A shop steward explained to me that every worker would soon be a trained rigger:

"The rigger is slowly becoming a dodo. It is a semi-skilled position. If we have to lift anything heavy we use a rigger. He has to understand weights and resultant angles and how angles can increase the actual force on the rope. Everyone will be trained in rigging. . . . I would say that the overall philosophy will be an "all dancing all singing person." (Interview: 10 July, 1987)

The shop steward also explained that all craftsmen were to be trained in metal burning, which he categorised as semi-skilled, explaining that it was one part of a fully skilled plater's job:

"If you look at a person's trade you might have several hundred skills put together to make a skilled process. For the plater metal burning is probably the lesser of the skills he has, but probably the most time consuming. He probably spends more time doing the lesser skills of his job whereas if we farm that out he can spend more time on the skilled aspects of his job." (Ibid.)

Thus, all craftsmen would become competent in the aspects of a number of trades commonly regarded as less skilled. This company employed instrument, mechanical and electrical craftsmen, leadburners, rubber and plastics workers, riggers, and platers. The Training Manager pointed out that within the job content of those working with rubber, plastics and lead and those in the fabrication workshop (platers), there was transferability of some skill elements:

"We would like to work to eventual amalgamation of those jobs into a workshop where everyone can do all the simple bits. Obviously there is going to be a highly technical element where only specialist individuals can do this." (Interview: 20 August, 1986)

For the shift process workers in this chemical plant, their future duties would include some basic electrical work and maintaining pumping equipment, as a personnel manager explained:

"Shift process operators will be carrying out some jobs previously done by instrument people. There will be first line maintenance training also for them. People who frequently have to pump out tanks or clean tanks out have been trained to maintain their own pumping equipment instead of it going into our workshops to be overhauled and being trained to isolate covers on tanks so that they can do the draining. This is mechanical work mainly." (Interview: 10 July, 1987)

The ultimate aim of this company was to transform their process operators into process technicians so that they would become first line maintenance workers. The Training Manager estimated that the average process worker could probably repair about 80 per cent of faults even without extra training. The aim was to formally qualify them to carry out these tasks.

The primary advantage in multi-skilling is the reduction of "downtime" and the resultant "knock-on" effect which can be felt throughout the plant when a process is held up because a craftsman must be brought from another part of the plant to isolate a simple piece of electrical equipment before the next phase of the process can be commenced.⁴

According to management and shop stewards, demarcation disputes were very much a thing of the past, as this shop steward explained:

"Occasionally they happen now, occasionally someone gets over ambitious and gets into someone else's central core skill. Now the two shop stewards would get together and managerial level would never hear about it. Most of the problems are solved at shop floor level anyway." (Interview: 20 January, 1987)

As stated earlier, much of the cost of training can be accounted for by loss of working hours whilst employees are away from their jobs, and obviously employers would seek to contain disruption to a minimum. One company had organised their new four-week cycle continental shift system to include periods of day shift (8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.) when there was a full-maintenance crew on site, when individuals could be released for retraining with the minimum of disruption. This was in addition to the computer-based training modules mentioned earlier, which would be 'on-going'. So within every four weeks ten days were available for training.

The new shift system was introduced as part of a package which included other changes in working practices besides computerisation. Prior to securing the massive investment which enabled most of the new developments to proceed, the company did not have a training manager on site. The job was created in view of the fact that a massive training requirement was anticipated.

There were two other training methods which stand out as of particular interest. The first involves employees themselves acting as trainers. The Industrial Relations Review and Report describe the system installed at Cadbury's Chirk plant whereby employees agreed to co-operate by training operatives. (Industrial Relations Review and Report, April 1984, p. 9) Although it was never made explicit by all the training managers this was probably a facet of all the training programmes covered by this study since invariably on returning to the plant newly retrained employees worked alongside more experienced operators and were closely supervised⁵, as one training manager explained:

"Handling chemical is dangerous. It takes 6 months before someone is really contributing. A month's induction training and the rest can vary from 5 to 6 months [before they can work competently on their own] when they are working with someone else all the time gaining experience. Within that time there may be periods when they were left on their own." (Interview: 19 August, 1986)

However, one of ^{the} companies described in detail in Chapter 7, ran into difficulty and some resentment in attempting to encourage craftsmen to impart their skill knowledge to craftsmen from other skill areas. This was an unusual case principally because the company had proposed redundancies prior to the introduction of multi-skilling amongst maintenance workers. This signalled a need for a change of tactic as a member of the management team pointed out:

"We had a bad patch on the retraining and sensed that one of the major problems was that I was saying to people you have to help yourself - communicate and pass skills across and things can happen on the job if a shift fitter and electrician team up and cross train each other. There was a very hostile reaction to that. People were saying we can only go so far. We can see the need for redundancies and multi-skills but to ask us to aid and abet in sending men down the road is asking too much. People said we do not mind being trained but it must be formally organised with external trainers." (Interview: 7 July, 1987)

The second method involves workers voluntarily undertaking training closely related to their work. This was not new, but was interesting in that in one company facilities for study were made available by the company through an open learning system. The use of open learning packages and interactive computer-based training was a reflection of the changing nature of jobs such as process operator where some understanding of the chemical processes was required. It should be noted that not all the process appreciation courses were offered on a voluntary basis. In some instances, as in the case of chargehands or supervisors, the knowledge thus gained was seen as an essential part of the job⁶, as a shop steward pointed out:

"A process chargehand is by definition first line management and even though he is non-qualified usually - some of them are taking a BTEC course in process technology which would take them up to ONC level. Doing it in their own time. They cannot do their job without it. Most process chargehands are qualified process operators and they have usually taken a full-time college course up to ONC level as part of their initial training, so a QPO would be up to ONC level in chemistry, physics and maths." (Interview: 16 June, 1987)

This same shop steward described how tradesmen were becoming more involved with the chemical processes themselves, as part of their day to day work, and how TEC courses designed for operators were also available to craftsmen.

SELECTION FOR RETRAINING

With the exception of one company, details of the criteria used to select employees for training were not made available. It is not clear why this was so, except that it may have been confidential information or it may have been difficult to tease out criteria that related specifically to trainability. Every one of the training managers I interviewed were reluctant to suggest that an employee was ever too old for retraining. This was the pattern throughout with some qualification, as this training manager explained:

"Whosoever needs the retraining - there are no limits. We ask what is the pay back so we would look at age. If he or she is the only employee doing the job in the company and it is important we would send them irrespective of age. One would examine the pay back in terms of how many years service this person would be likely to pay back.

"It also depends on the type of job. A new technology, high technology job would limit us to someone under forty. It depends however on background and experience." (Interview: 19 January, 1987)

Of primary importance is the return the company will receive on its investment in the individual who is retrained. More than one company said they based selection for retraining on the employee's past operating performance and in the case of Crowtree Chemicals, attendance and other records were used. There appeared to be no

universally adopted method for selecting individuals for retraining. Although it is difficult to generalise, with the ongoing training programmes the procedure seemed to be that when a need was recognised and the return on investment in time and money was deemed to be acceptable the retraining went ahead, as a Personnel Manager explained:

"Either we identify a need or one of the training staff identifies a need, recognising that something is changing or is about to change. On other occasions maybe it is an external influence for example a course is advertised in the local press that somebody is interested in. We do not have an appraisal scheme but that is not to say that discussions do not take place between managers and staff. But there is no set scheme." (Interview: 19 January, 1987)

Where training accompanied broader changes in working practices the organisation was much more highly structured.

Two companies were keen to stress the value of retraining existing employees in preference to recruiting workers who had been trained elsewhere. Management at the first company suggested that:

"If you can make it with the existing people it is worth trying. They gain a tremendous amount of background from working at the same job for a number of years and that knowledge is hard to replace." (Interview: 15 September, 1986)

The personnel manager at the second company, also acknowledged the value of existing knowledge when considering retraining. He pointed out that his company would look for expertise externally only when that expertise was not already available within the company. (Interview: 20 August, 1986)

The material available under this heading is extremely limited and it is impossible to come to any real firm conclusions except that it was ultimately the return the company

would receive on its investment in an individual which determined whether training or retraining was a viable proposition. As far as can be ascertained there were no other universally held criteria which were applied in selecting individuals for retraining.

Decisions about retraining were made by management not by the workers themselves. Nevertheless, retraining was, for many workers, a very attractive prospect; and analysing worker responses to changes in the workplace, including retraining, is important given the degree to which technological change has affected the British workforce in recent years.

THE RETRAINING EXPERIENCE

A study published early in 1987 which examined technical change in 2,000 workplaces, found that technological change affected one third of the workforce in the recession years up to 1984.⁷ The survey also discovered that technological change was generally received enthusiastically by the workforce in Britain, although organisational change was far less popular. Invariably, and possibly inevitably, organisational change accompanied technological change or change involving reskilling; and evidence gleaned from interview material seemed to suggest that the greatest fear and discontent stemmed not from retraining or changes in job content but from wholesale reorganisation.

Although it is possible to pick out common themes in the answers given by interviewees to my questions about the impact and nature of their retraining, some

small doubt remains as to their representativeness. Taking into account methodological explanations which suggest that people give the answers they think you want and so on, this research was handicapped in that most interviewees were selected for me by management. Although, the responses of these individuals were undoubtedly accurate accounts of their own perceptions, these perceptions may have been at variance with those held by their fellow workers.

It became apparent from my discussions with shop stewards and workers that attitudes towards retraining or the introduction of new machinery or changes in working patterns varied as might be expected. Also as might be expected, they varied according to age group, with the younger workers showing more enthusiasm. A shop steward explained that:

"The young ones are scrambling for it. The middle-aged guys take it or leave it and the fifty-fives and over just do not want to know. The young people think there is a future with the company and their future will be more secure, and they will be looked upon more favourably for promotion if they work to maximum flexibility. They need to be seen to be participating in retraining. The middle-aged guy says I have seen it all before. I am not going to get over excited about it. The older chaps say you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. A lot of them are frightened. There are one or two who cannot think flexibly. The older you get you tend not to think so flexibly. They have all this experience and do not want to change things. I tend to think these guys are the best fitters. We have not got the skills they had years ago. They will deal with minute details on the job. There is more pride in the job for the older man." (Interview 20 January, 1987)

In his statement this shop steward mentioned several issues which impinge on retraining. He talked about the insecurity individuals feel, especially older individuals, when change is mooted, and implicitly the fear that they will be compared with younger, more mentally and physically agile workers. He mentioned the ambition that the drive for security can intensify in individuals, especially younger men still with young families and large mortgages. The impression the older workers may have of being

passed by is not always an illusion. In a company that was undergoing complete reorganisation with all workers having to reapply for their jobs, a shop steward informed me that the company was following a policy of promoting many of the younger workers between the ages of twenty and thirty to the more senior positions within the plant. He believed that the retraining these younger men received would give them confidence and enable them to hold down such jobs:

"I think they are willing, not because they actually want it [the senior jobs], but because once they have done the training they know they will be superior. . ." (Interview: 24 April, 1987)

To be young and well trained seemed to be the magic combination that would secure a future. The following response came from a worker in his early twenties:

"I have enjoyed the training, it has been good. . . . We are under no pressure, but the older people seem to think so. They do not seem to take it in as quickly as we do. They are very stuck in their ways, especially with the computerised training. . . . it is a totally new thing to them. . . .

"The older people are not happy because they feel threatened. Rumours are circulating that people over fifty have to go. Management have also said that the average age of the company's employees will be lower in the future. Under the old set up they felt safe. Now it is the other way round. The amount of young people coming in the gates - and they have all been trained up by colleges - and the people trained on the plant will be qualified." (Interview: 16 June, 1987)

One older trainee, however, offered a contrasting view point:

"There are different feelings. The nitric acid people have had the most retraining of anybody. Everyone that retrained on this plant was between the ages of thirty and forty. A couple were in their twenties. The company seems to have gone for older people. One chap is about forty-seven. I am about in the middle - forty. They probably find us more responsible. The majority of people on the nitric acid plant have been ex-chargehands for some reason." (Interview: 16 June, 1987)

A preoccupation was to link difficulties in adaptation and the inability to learn quickly and under new conditions with age. A 45 year old worker applied for, and was offered,

a new job in the factory stores department where he was required to work with a computer. He complained that:

"The young ones look at me a bit strange because they pick it up. Everything has to be done in a rush. You need to put pressure on people to learn the skills that have been learned with experience over years. We have a few months only. The job is still running when you are trying to train. The pressure is there. We have to learn everything immediately. No one has gone off sick because of the pressure, but when the plant starts running properly there may be problems. It is a worry that I have got myself." (Interview: 24 April, 1987)

Some workers, like the above, exhibited fear and trepidation that they might not be able to cope with the pressure. By contrast, many more, who had undergone training, emerged confident in their own abilities to perform their new skills competently. But a lot of the success of training schemes depended upon the pace of the training and fitting it to the learning capabilities of the trainee. A company who were reskilling their maintenance workers found themselves forced to modify their training programme in the light of feedback from trainees, as a member of the management team explained:

"We had to cut down the amount of electrical work the day fitters were going to do in terms of retraining. We got strong vibes back from two who were worried about the whole business and could not cope with it. I altered schemes and cut the electrical schemes from three to one. I did it on the strength of the reaction back from some of the people." (Interview: 15 September, 1987)

There are occasions when an individual just cannot cope with the change. In the larger companies such people were transferred to "softer" positions within the company, or where the transfer to computerisation was gradual or only partial, individual workers continued to work with the older equipment. A production supervisor explained how one particular worker had problems coping with the physical distance that computerisation created between himself and the process he was controlling:

"They [the company] had chosen four operators from each team and they had been very successful in terms of training. One of them 'copped out' because he did not feel he was making chemicals. He was the active type who wanted to be out there. They put him back

on the machines. He had a history of certain nervous disorders so he may not have felt fully competent. He said it was a heck of a responsibility." (Interview: 19 August, 1986)

Even those who had successfully completed retraining in the operation of computerised chemical processing were sceptical at first about the new system's ability to fault find:

"You can hear it if a valve is open down on the plant. With the VDU there is no noise, just a change in the VDU picture. We did not believe at first that what the computer said was the truth." (Interview with trainee: 19 August, 1986)

Real resistance to retraining seemed to occur only when it threatened job security, but invariably that threat comes from the reorganisation of work or for example changes in trade union recognition rather than retraining per se. The converse is also true that retraining is welcomed when it increases job security. However, the source of that job security is being perceived as less and less within the realm of the trade union and more and more concerned with involvement and identification with the company. An IDS study No. 360 challenges the contradictory nature of trade union response to workplace change exemplified by "skirmishes" over single union agreements.

The study also looks at the organisational changes and changes in working practices which follow the introduction of new technology as well as "the greater pressure on their members to identify with the success of the firms they are working for". (Incomes Data Services, April, 1986, p. 21)

The report explains that the notion of a possible shift in worker alliance from the union to the company is partly explained by the belief that skills and qualifications are becoming more company specific. IDS refute this, however, and state that their research suggests that new training is designed to generalise the skills of the

craftworker, thus the worker becomes more mobile and independent.

This research would suggest that the forces that push the worker into dependency upon the employer are external and economic and not related to skill content. Skills were important inasmuch as their acquisition and proven competent performance ensure the worker a degree of security and job stability within the company. Once skills were stripped of the elitism and sometimes necessary protectionism that has encased them since the middle ages, workers, like for example this craftsmen, have shown their willingness to acquire additional competencies:

"I think it is a good idea personally. It makes my job a lot easier. It makes the job more interesting and there is more involvement. You become more involved in the company also. There has been a change over the last four years gradually. A coming round to this way of thinking. It has not come in over night. We saw it as inevitable - something you have to adjust to. Initially the stronger union members were interested in job protection. I think these people have left and people think it is safe now." (Interview: 10 July, 1987)

The plus side to reorganisation is that it gave some workers a second chance. A twenty-eight year old fitter who had served his apprenticeship with the company had lost his job under a previous restructuring exercise and had to accept a position as a process operator/cleaner. Under the latest reorganisation he applied and was accepted for the position of maintenance fitter and underwent retraining including an open learning course in chemical engineering. He was ambitious and prepared to study to achieve promotion. Another employee of the same company, now in his early 40s had lost his job as a supervisor with a neighbouring company and after one year's unemployment accepted a job as a forklift truck driver with this company. He described this as a "boring job" and the reorganisation enabled him to transfer to what he regarded as a more responsible job as a process worker, where he was undergoing retraining. In both these cases the individuals implicated the union in circumstances

which had led to their loss of job, and the younger of the two was prepared to expand upon his comments:

"I think the unions have too much control in this factory. I think that is bad. I got offered a job on shifts, the managers wanted me. I said yes I would like it. It was more money and operating plant. When I came back from a week's holiday someone else had got the job, the unions had vetoed it because I had not been on the job as long as this other person had. . . . they keep you down all the time." (Interview: 16 June, 1987)

An unfortunate outcome was that the unions are represented as intractable and reactionary and sometimes the arguments were presented as union loyalty verses ambition and personal advancement.

CONCLUSION

An IDS study, "Flexibility at Work" details the practice of a Japanese manufacturing company, Sony, with a plant in the United Kingdom. A member of the management team is quoted as follows:

"If it's a choice we'll go for 90 per cent skill and 100 per cent attitude and never the other way round." (Incomes Data Services, April, 1986, p. 15)

Sony's main aim, states the article, is to " . . . train an attitude; skill will come later". However, the article does not make clear exactly how Sony encourages the development of "attitude". From observing and talking to workers who agreed to participate in this research it seems that attitudinal change was, in part, a pragmatic response by individuals based on a concern to preserve their communities and

maintain the security of their families within those communities. They were responses to the threat of unemployment and the promise of improved economic reward. To confine the explanation to purely economic motives is to offer too narrow an explanation since there are numerous social outcomes to job loss.

"New" attitudes were not so explicit in the retraining process, but were encouraged principally as a result of the changes in working practices which were instituted concurrently with the retraining programme; for example the weakening of trade union power within a company and the harmonisation of employee status, as outlined in Chapter 7. It should be noted, however, that such changes were only possible given the general economic and political climate outside the companies.

This is not to suggest that retraining operates in a vacuum innocent of the practical social and attitudinal changes that are intended to take place. Workers themselves recognised the value of retraining for themselves as well as their company and acknowledge the effort and commitment that both parties must make for retraining to be successful. Those individuals who were interviewed took a pride in their work and their skills. It was not the skills that bound the workers to the company but economic circumstances. The acquisition of skills through retraining and the competent execution of those skills in a job of work offered not only personal satisfaction, but also some assurance of relatively secure employment.

There is another sense in which retraining is about changing attitudes, and perhaps this is what the Sony management were referring to at least in part; and that is attitudes towards learning and towards change as part of the learning process. Then perhaps flexibility of attitude in one sphere, that is learning a new skill, can be utilised in another sphere.

From the point of view of the employer, however, retraining takes on a more manipulative character. Political and economic changes create the circumstances whereby working practices can be transformed, and retraining is the means by which the workforce can be reskilled and remoulded to best satisfy the needs of capital accumulation. It is part of the process of disciplining the workforce, as will be elaborated below.

NOTES

- ¹ See: Chapter 11 for a discussion of Atkinson's model of the flexible firm.
- ² This was a relatively small company and relations between the operatives and the Production Supervisor appeared to be co-operative. The two young male operatives whom I interviewed expressed satisfaction with the training and enthusiasm for their work.
- ³ It may mean semi-skilled workers executing the tasks previously reserved for skilled workers or vice versa. ("Flexibility Agreements the End of Who Does What", Industrial Relations Review 316 (March 1984), pp. 2-9.)
- ⁴ An article in the Industrial Relations Review and Report in 1984 described the typical problems experienced with high levels of skill demarcation:
- ". . . among skilled craftsmen specific trades carry out specific tasks; electricians and fitters wait on each other to isolate and disconnect motors; mechanics and electricians wait on welders and vice versa. At the craft/semi-skilled interface there are plants where operatives are not allowed to fit certain items of tooling or machine equipment without a maintenance craftsman being present. In others, an insistence by general workers and their unions on the operation of internal transport for moving plant and equipment around a site means that skilled millwrights or pipe fitters cannot carry out driving duties where needed." ("Flexibility Agreements the End of Who Does What", Industrial Relations Review, 316 (March 1984), p. 3.)
- ⁵ This is an old practice which still finds its place alongside more modern and innovative training methods.
- ⁶ See also Rainbird and Grant, Employers Associations and Training Policy, (University of Warwick: Institute for Employment Research, 1985), p. 40.
- ⁷ See: a study by Daniel which used data prepared as part of the 1984 Workplace Industrial Relations Survey, sponsored by the Department of Employment, the Economic and Social Research council, the Policy Studies Institute and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. It examined both technical change including that involving non-micro-electronic equipment and organisational change to working practices. (W. W. Daniel, Workplace Industrial Relations and Technical Change, (London: PSI/Francis Pinter, 1984).)

PART FOUR

**THE RETRAINING
EXPERIENCE**

CHAPTER 9

SKILLS AND DESKILLING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine changes in skills over time and the ways in which retraining intervenes to effect such changes. It will examine whether deskillling has occurred, in which form it has occurred and how this has an impact on employment relationships. This chapter also suggests that skill is being socially reconstructed in a period of industrial change, that skills are perhaps becoming more enterprise specific. For further education colleges this presents a problem. The colleges function at a distance from the workplace and are thus removed from the specific requirements of industry. This distance forces the colleges to operate with a stable and sometimes rigid view of what skills are about, rather than the notion of skill as being continually reconstructed. The issue for the colleges is making the connection with what is occurring in industry in terms of skill at a time of dramatic change.

The chapter begins by laying out the various definitions of deskilling which have been suggested by sociologists. This is done in order to consider their appropriateness as analytical tools. As outlined in Chapter 1, it is possible to conceive of a skill as containing within it several elements both objective and subjective. When skill changes are examined in terms of what Beechey refers to as "objective competencies", no overall deskilling is discernable. (Beechey, 1982, pp. 63-64) In fact the general trend suggests reskilling or upskilling. However, by examining skills subjectively, by treating skills as social constructs or as capable of generating particular sets of social relationships, it will be shown that deskilling is in evidence. This deskilling may take the form of less control over the manner in which skills are executed and over the immediate working environment when employers introduce more flexible methods of working. It may also take the form of changes in the social environment, in relations with management and other workers, when workers bargain trade union representation for improved conditions of work. Finally, it can take the form of restricting the movement of workers between companies. This occurs when companies develop programmes to strengthen employee commitment to the company and retrain in firm-specific skills, especially in circumstances of high unemployment outside of the company.

All of these examples took place in the companies studied as part of this research and in all cases the changes were introduced as part of a general package which included training. In some cases training was the tool which eased the transition. This chapter is based on material collected from the few trainees it was possible to interview, but mainly from observations and discussions with management and trade union representatives. Where appropriate comments from students at West Biscop College are included because many of these individuals were also skilled workers who had their own ideas of what skill represented.

DEFINITIONS OF DESKILLING

Literature on deskilling generally centres around the effects of technological change on the labour process. There is, however, another body of literature which follows directly from Braverman's examination of Taylorism in 'Labour and Monopoly Capitalism'. Both are outlined below.

DESKILLING AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Within the body of literature which seeks to examine the effects of technical change, there are those studies based on the deskilling theme which treat skills as purely objective competencies. They show an uneven and inconclusive picture of skill changes. A few examples of such studies are presented here.

The first study was carried out in New South Wales, Australia by Denis J. Davis. It was based on responses from trades people who were asked to state what effect they believed technological change had on the knowledge and skill content of their jobs. This is interesting because it looks at the perception of the individuals directly affected. (Davis, Spring 1988) The study concludes that new technology has had an overall upgrading impact on the knowledge-content of jobs and a downgrading impact on the skill-content, although more respondents reported an upgrading in skill requirements than reported a downgrading. Impact varied from trade to trade with motor mechanics and electricians reporting the highest level of upgrading and carpenters and joiners in

building reporting the greatest downgrading of skills and knowledge requirements.

The problem with this study is that it relies quite heavily on the subjective viewpoints of the workers and as Davis points out with reference to a study by Rajan. (Rajan, Spring 1988, p. 49) There are also problems in measuring loss of job specific skills against gains in diagnostic skills. Furthermore, how can we be sure that what is being measured at one particular point in time is representative of a general trend. What looks like an upgrading in skills or an increase in employment may be part of a general downgrading trend.¹

A second study of 48 engineering plants in Britain in 1980 by Senker and Beesley points to uneven deskilling. In plants which had installed new technology and where craftsmen were expected to carry out maintenance work, the demands for maintenance skills were greater and more diverse. (Senker and Beesley, 1986, p. 12)

In a third study of engineering craftsmen who were required to maintain process plant, the range of skills performed by these individuals was expanded to take account of new responsibilities:

"... there is a requirement to possess skills and knowledge across a number of trades, an ability to systematically fault-find and diagnose problems, and have an understanding of the manufacturing process and its relationship with engineering aspects of a machine". (Cross, 1985, p. xiv)

In referring to a study carried out by Brady and a further IMS study Graham Reid, Chief Economic Adviser at the Department of Employment reporting to an International symposium in Tokyo in 1985 also identified a trend towards multiple-skill craftsmen and the use of technicians in maintenance work as diagnosticians. He concluded generally that some deskilling had occurred, but no clear pattern resulted. Some firms used

technology "to replace craftsmen" whilst others used it to enhance their skills. (Reid, 1985, pp. 153-155)

Probably this description from a foreman at one of the plants best exemplifies how involved people, who have opportunity to develop an overview, assess the situation:

"There has probably been some deskilling on the process side where machines are now carrying out tasks which were previously carried out manually. Tools and equipment have changed. We have computerised lathes now; and there are additional skills required to operate these lathes. The lathes themselves can operate to greater tolerances than the old manual lathes could. Even micrometers are on a digital read out now, this means that the old skills of reading micrometers have disappeared, it is now much easier. I think though that skills are changing rather than being deskilled. I would say there is more technical skill and less manual skill. It is difficult to analyse whether you need more or less skill." (Interview: 20 January 1987)

Finally, Helen Rainbird in her study of new technology and training in industry also noted an uneven picture:

"Some workers are enjoying improved conditions of employment, greater job security and, by becoming more flexible and acquiring new skills, arguably becoming more skilled. Others are still employed but are finding their work deskilled and degraded. But undeniably, new technology has been a major contributory factor towards massive job losses and this, combined with the casualisation of large sectors of the working population through firms' use of part-time, short-term contract and sub-contracted labour, has resulted in both a degradation of work and a deskilling process through loss of skills at the societal level." (Rainbird, 1986, p. 3)

The overall picture is not just uneven, but complex too. However, if the picture is expanded, a clearer pattern may be discernable, as this somewhat pessimistic quotation from Thompson suggests:

"Variations of conditions and time-scale within the deskilling process are recognised. At the start of a cycle of technical change and work restructuring there is often a partial inversion of the general tendency. Widespread deskilling is often accompanied by an increased 'qualification' of a smaller layer of workers involved in planning, programming and similar tasks. But the general tendency immediately tends to reassert itself as the enhanced skills are subjected to similar

sub-specialisation and the embodiment as skills in more complex machinery.² (Thompson, P., (1984), pp. 72-73)

TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

Still looking at the effects of technological change, writers have asked whether technology itself determines workplace organisation or whether management strategies conceived to make for effective use of new technology are the determining force. In this context it should be asked what are these management strategies and what do managers really want?

This thesis agrees with More, who rejects the technologically determinist viewpoint, and states that:

"... predictions about necessary tendencies towards deskilling are invalid, partly because of social factors . . . but also because technological developments do not universally contain within themselves deskilling tendencies." (More, 1982, p. 121)

Wood is in agreement with More in suggesting that the "logic of capitalist accumulation" and not the "imperatives of technology" itself are responsible for changes in the way work is organized. (Wood, 1985, p. 76)

The general theme of much of the literature around the deskilling debate suggests that scope for workers control must be eliminated because capital needs labour which is cheap and flexible. If we accept the "logic of capital" and not "technology" itself as the moving force, there are three means by which capitalist logic works its way out. All three of these tend towards deskilling. The first is by "replacement of the relationship between labour and tools by the relationship between labour and machine" and the

second is that "all tasks requiring some special skill for their operation are divided off as separate jobs. . . . to as few specialised workers as possible". Finally unskilled and semi-skilled tasks are fragmented and deskilled even further.³ (Brighton Labour Process Group, Spring 1977, p. 19)

BRAVERMAN AND THE LABOUR PROCESS DEBATE

Dividing off specialised tasks and fragmentation of semi-skilled tasks is the subject of Braverman's work. Here the emphasis shifts from the deskilling effects of technology to the impact that the fragmentation of jobs horizontally and vertically can have on the work process. It is not intended to present an exhaustive study of the labour process debate. This brief review is included, not only because the work of Braverman represents a significant contribution to the debate on deskilling and work degradation, but also because certain of the issues raised are relevant to this thesis. For example, Braverman asserted the importance of control and autonomy in the exercise of skill.

Marx emphasised the 'real subordination' of labour to capital and the extraction of 'relative surplus value' through the fragmentation of work and greater use of machinery in production. Braverman eschewed what is often interpreted as the more technological determinist interpretation of Marx, and examined what he saw as an increasing level of deskilling and 'degradation' of work through a more developed division of labour under monopoly capitalism. These, as Wood explains, Braverman saw as developments resulting from the " . . . structure of constraints and incentives created by the property relations of capitalism", as inherent tendencies in the capitalist labour process. (Wood, 1985, p. 79)

Braverman has been credited with rejuvenating the sociological study of the workplace and the labour process (Littler and Salaman, 1982, p. 251) and presenting an "impressively concrete restatement of Marx's analysis of the tendency for capital to transform the labour process in the direction of simple, specialised and determined labour". (Elger, 1979, p. 62)

The central theme of his work, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, is that through the use of Taylorist techniques, management, under the phase of monopoly capitalism in the 20th century sought to achieve tighter control over the labour process by fragmenting jobs both vertically and horizontally. Horizontal fragmentation involves jobs divided into smaller tasks which are allocated to various individuals; and vertical fragmentation divides conception from execution of the same job. This work by Braverman spawned a series of contributions by Marxists and non-Marxists.

Firstly, and principally, Braverman is criticised for what is regarded as his deterministic account of capital's impulsion to deskill and to control. Braverman is criticised for his portrayal of capital as "fully conscious of its historical interests and organised to achieve them." (Stark, 1980, p. 95) Instead, Elger suggests a more adequate analysis would be one where deskilling is seen more specifically as a tendency within the capitalist labour process in order to take account of the "specific exigencies and contradictions of valorisation and accumulation which beset capitalist production and undermine the specific adequacy of real subordination." (Elger, 1979, p. 67)

The second major criticism is directed at what is widely regarded as an inadequate conceptualisation of the role of the working class and his neglect of class struggle within the capitalist labour process, which stems from his wish to write: "about the

working class as a class in itself, not a class for itself." (Braverman, 1974, pp. 26-27) While he does, it seems, acknowledge the existence of working class resistance the major criticism is that he does not award it a role in the evolution of the labour process. (Stark, 1980, p. 92)

Braverman is also accused of idealising craft skills in precapitalist societies. Littler suggests that the romantic "ideal of craftsmanship" developed by Ruskin which also influenced C. Wright Mills,⁴ formed the basis for Braverman's conception with its emphasis on "the unity of conception and execution of planning and doing." (Littler, 1982, p. 11)

Braverman's view of the relationship between labour and capital in the workplace has been frequently criticised for presenting too simplistic a polarity. Elger points out that the labour/capital relationship is far more complex and contradictory than Braverman's account suggests. (Elger, 1979, p. 60 and p. 63) In particular, Braverman's account suggests that vestiges of craft skills remained as an "obstacle to capital". This lends strength to his argument that the destruction of craft skills through Taylorist techniques leads to the degradation of work and proletarianisation of the working class. Elger, however, points out that craft skills were "transformed and encapsulated within modern industry in ways which sustained significant forms of expertise", and were tolerated by capital for purposes of increasing productive capacity. Indeed these skills became the basis of a relatively privileged and autonomous position occupied by the skilled working class. (Ibid., p. 74)

For the purposes of this research Braverman's thesis is not rejected out of hand. Rather it is accepted but with modifications suggested by other writers. Whilst some writers have been content with amending or adding to the Braverman analysis others

have suggested alternative theses in arguing against a simple deskilling hypothesis. These include the Human Capital Approach, the Compensatory Theory of Skill, the Neo-Classical Model and other writings which give emphasis to the role of labour markets. (See Appendix 5 for further details.)

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN INDUSTRY

Having rejected the technological determinist view in the previous section, this behoves us to ask, what do management hope to achieve by the introduction of technological change or making other changes in the work process whether or not they ultimately lead to the degradation of work. Do they, as Colin Gill asks "do so primarily to increase their control over labour"? (Gill, 1985, p. 87)

Marglin leads us to the conclusion that this is exactly their intention. He describes how the development of the factory method of production and the detailed division of labour were attempts to impose greater control over the labourforce. This is necessary he argues because the interests of workers and capital are fundamentally opposed and tighter control is necessary to ensure profit maximisation. (Marglin, 1986, pp. 63-64)

Edwards also emphasises the struggle between workers and management over the control of work processes. He suggests that 20th century management attempt to control the workforce through increasingly sophisticated methods such as bureaucratic rules and industrial relations procedures and by attempting to:

". . . organize production in such a way as to minimise opportunities for resistance and even to alter workers' perceptions of the desirability of opposition." (Edwards, 1979, quoted in Francis, 1986, pp. 76-77)

Gill, however, concludes that whilst there is evidence to suggest that to weaken worker control may be the motive in some cases, it is not possible to generalise. The results of investigations by Rose and Jones and Bessant show a lack of any "defined motive on the part of management." Also the evidence in these writings suggest that management within a company rarely operates as a homogenous unit. (Rose and Jones, 1983, quoted in Gill, 1985, p. 87; Bessant, 1983, quoted in Gill, 1985, p. 87; Gill, 1985)

Penn (Penn, 1982, pp. 96-97) supports this view as does Perrow (Perrow, 1961, quoted in Buchanan, 1986, p. 68). Reed also suggests that:

"... management decision making is a social process with political and moral dimensions which are not wholly subordinated to the single-minded pursuit of administrative and technical necessities." (Reed, 1984, quoted in Buchanan, 1986, p. 68)

Buchanan is also in agreement and makes the following four points:

"First, managers pursue a wide range of objectives; not all managers are closely wedded to the capitalist imperative in their decision-making. Second, developments in technology trigger a management decision-making process in which various managerial objectives are translated into work and organisation structures. Third, contemporary information and computing technologies potentially enhance operator control of the work process and increase management dependence on operator skill, knowledge and experience. . . . [Fourth] The decisions which determine the organisation and control of the labour process are made and influenced by middle and junior managers who often work at a distance from the capitalist imperative. They pursue a range of objectives, related to personal careers as well as to corporate policy." (Buchanan, 1986, pp. 66-67)

It would seem reasonable to assume that managers pursue a fairly wide range of different objectives. Concern over the control of machines, people and processes represents only one set of objectives considered by the three levels of management as

defined by Buchanan. The other sets of objectives being strategic and operating. Control objectives were the concern of middle and junior line management. (Ibid., p. 78)

At a superficial level, statements to the effect that management decisions are based on a variety of motives some of which may not be directly related to the production process for example decisions designed to enhance career advancement may indeed be accurate. However, these managers are operating within organisations whose stated goals are to develop and turn out products or services which will realise a profit for the organisation. Day to day decisions may not be designed to impose direct control over workers but will be aimed at improving product flow or product design and thus increase profit realisation. These decisions implicitly represent attempts to reassert control over the flow of production which may temporarily have slackened. If production is not flowing at its optimum level then surely control must be less than perfect. In effecting control over the work process control is also exerted over the workers who operate those processes. The ultimate goal of the organisation is profit maximisation and this is accorded primacy. Control is not necessarily a primary conscious goal of management, although under certain circumstances and at certain times in history other minor goals must be subordinated to it in the pursuit of profit.

The next point is central to the argument. As the Labour Process Group point out, it is not essential for the "personification of capital" to always take a specific form. (Brighton Labour Process Group, Spring 1977, p. 18) Edwards, for example, recognises a development in the stages of control exercised by capital, he distinguishes between simple, technical and bureaucratic control. Simple control is synonymous with the small firm where personal ties between employer and employee are significant; technical control is typical of the large automated corporation with assembly line production; and finally bureaucratic control represents a solution to the contradictions

of technical control and is exemplified by routinization and the subordination of productive activity to rules. (Edwards, 1979, quoted in Burawoy, 1981, p. 91)

Bureaucratic control, as Edwards describes it is not, however, without contradictions, and Edwards recognises this. As Burawoy states: "A system of rules and sanctions does not itself generate consent, but defines the arena within which workers are free from arbitrary intervention by management." (Burawoy, 1981, p. 92)

The relationship between workers and management, as representatives of capital in the workplace, is an interdependent one and some degree, albeit minimal, of cooperation and consent is necessary for efficiency and to tap the creativity of workers themselves. There are other less direct forms of control which are also related to production, and which attempt to elicit a degree of involvement and cooperation from the workforce. They concern the condition of the workforce and range from involvement of the workforce in decision making, to job redesign, to offering terms of employment to shop floor workers which are comparable to those of administrative staff. Burawoy describes this as a shift from "despotism under competitive capitalism" to "hegemony under monopoly capitalism".⁵

"Thus within the monopoly sector of advanced capitalism, the translation of labour power can no longer be secured through economic coercion. Rather, the labour process comes to be regulated by a production politics in which consent prevails over coercion. The particular form developed in the United States rests on grievance machinery and internal labour markets which constitute workers as individuals with rights and obligations. Workers are bound to the firm, their interests coordinate with the present and future growth (or decline) of the firm through seniority clauses governing transfers between jobs, lay-offs, supplementary unemployment benefits, pensions, vacations, and so on. Collective bargaining not only reasserts the common interest of management and provides a terrain for the periodic absorption and reorganisation of struggle, but also constrains managerial discretion. The rise of factory apparatuses based on rules with a certain autonomy - that is, rules that cannot be changed at will, but only through definite procedures - protects management, at least in the normal run of affairs, from itself. That is, it ~~re~~strains management's own tendency towards arbitrary commands, which would undermine the organization of consent. In short, despotism under competitive capitalism gives way to hegemony under monopoly capitalism, whether it be the bureaucratic

pattern of the United States, the anarchic patterns of Britain, or the corporatist pattern of Japan." (Ibid., pp. 99-100)

These ideas developed from the work of the 'human relations' school and the Hawthorne Experiments in Chicago in the 1920s and are sometimes referred to as work humanization. This approach, which aims at creating a cooperative but personally fulfilled workforce, is recognized by Bosquet as replacing:

"... the order and discipline of the barracks with the voluntary co-operation of workers whose autonomy and power extends to his (or her) work." (Bosquet, 1980, quoted in Wood, 1985, p. 97)

We should not confuse work humanisation with work restructuring schemes which are often introduced to solve economic crises or production problems by increasing efficiency and productivity. In Britain in the 1980s much work restructuring which involved more flexible working paid no cognisance to job enrichment.⁶(Wood, 1982, p. 99)

CONCLUSION

Skill is a complex combination of both subjective and objective attributes, with different meanings for different individuals in different circumstances. Control and autonomy are important components of skill which enable knowledge and dexterity to be applied in combination, providing the greatest degree of fulfilment, pleasure and satisfaction. That is, control and autonomy within the execution of a task. Control and autonomy within the wider working environment is important also, and it is this peripheral area which is being 'chipped away' in some of the companies which are written about in this study.

This chapter has reviewed the problems of measuring deskilling. By looking at skills as objectively defined competencies only, we are left with a picture of an uneven and confusing process with some old skills disappearing to be replaced by other new and technologically based skills, whilst some other skills disappear altogether. Individuals move from one sector of industry where their skills become redundant to new developing sectors where these skills are in demand or they retrain in new skills. All this is part of a natural process of change and development. If instead skills are seen as an amalgam of both objectively and subjectively defined attributes, taking into consideration the wider working environment and the skilled workers control over that environment, a somewhat different picture emerges.

This conclusion is based on a rejection of the Human Capital and Neo-Classical Models for the reasons outlined in Appendix 5. Braverman is rejected in part, again because of the reasons given, but principally because of his view of deskilling which suggests a progressive, unremitting and even process. For Braverman too deskilling is highly visible. Rejected too, in part, is the Labour Market theory because it gives prominence to markets over the labour/capital relationship. More acceptable is the Compensatory Theory of Skill which suggests that skilling and deskilling take place simultaneously thus producing a complex pattern of occupational change. (See Appendix 5)

Technological determinism is also rejected, but it is accepted that technology, in the charge of employers can be used to deskill the workforce. Attention is therefore given to the motives which inform management decision-making, which are shown to be governed by political and moral considerations as well as technical and administrative objectives. Control over workers and the work process is not, it is suggested, the primary aim of managers. However, at the end of the day, managers are also

employees and also subject to the demands of the organisation. The very *raison d'être* of the organisation is profit maximisation; and, as circumstances both within and without the organisation change, there are occasions when control must be reasserted to maintain production at optimum levels.

Employees are not machines and the relationship between management and workers is social in nature. It is an unequal yet dependent relationship. Workers are dependent upon the company for their livelihood and the modern company requires of its skilled workforce compliance, flexibility creativity and commitment. Technical and bureaucratic control were attempts by management to manufacture these attitudes in employees. But they were only partly successful. The data from this research suggests a new form of hegemonic control being exercised by employers through a new style of management, and retraining has an important role to play.

Within the organisations which were studied there is evidence of a new approach to the management of workers and the work process. A less conflictual approach where employees are encouraged to develop a commitment to the organisation. Indeed workers do already have an interest in the success of the company which employs them. In turn the company demonstrates its commitment to its workforce by improving working conditions and offering to shopfloor employees conditions of employment more in line with those enjoyed by administrative and management staff. This shift in direction is part of a generally acknowledged need for change on the technical side too. Change that involves updating technology, introducing more flexible methods of working and enhancing the skills of workers. The change is experienced by workers as a total package. The improved conditions of employment are presented to them alongside details of retraining programmes, changing shift patterns, more flexible systems of work and plans for multi-skilling. The opportunity to retrain suggests to an

employee that the company is prepared to invest in him or her for the future. Retraining demands commitment and extra effort on the part of the employee and the new or updated skills will, it is hoped, secure a place on the company payroll for the future. With unemployment still relatively high outside of the factory gates the worker needs to see his or her job with the company as permanent. The job soon begins to look more like a career, with the possibility of advancement, especially when retraining is available and employees are encouraged to extend their retraining through their own individual efforts in their spare time.

Workers are also involved more in problem-solving as members of quality circles. A system, imported from Japan, which recognises and harnesses those tacit skills which workers have long exercised on their own behalf in the execution of their skills. Quality circles are not only harnessing technical tacit skills but also those social skills which involve good work habits, commitment and pride in the job. Attempts are now being made to extend that commitment and pride to the company itself through new approaches. These new arrangements, as Rainbird has pointed out would serve to "dignify work" if workers exercised any real control over the work process. (Rainbird, 1986, p. 12)

However, these improved conditions of work and the retraining and investment packages are not achieved without sacrifice. They are offered in exchange for reduced control and autonomy through the weakening of collective strength. Management achieve greater control because they have a workforce which circumstances have caused to accept a firmer commitment to the company; and trade unions are further weakened as workers trade representation for the benefits of the new style employer/employee relationships.

This too is deskilling in the sense that workers will find themselves with reduced freedom to exercise their skills within the working environment. It is less visible than the deskilling described by Braverman. Greater flexibility will be demanded of them in the pursuit of higher productivity, and retraining will ensure that their skills are of the required standard and suitably malleable. Their necessary commitment to the one company and the abandonment of trade union representation may reduce their control over the wider working environment on a day to day level when disputes over working practices arise or when the company finds it necessary to cut-back in times of recession. Objectively their skills may be extended and enhanced but autonomy in the exercise of those skills may be subject to very tight constraints.

If all these changes amount to a reconstruction of the notion of skill, there are two questions to be posed. The first concerns whether this reconstruction of skills is in fact a deskilling process? The second question is an ethical one, and pertains to the role of further education colleges in training and retraining workers. If further education was reorganised in such a way to provide the type of training and retraining industry requires, would it be acceptable for them to do so?

NOTES

¹ See also: Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capitalism, who views deskilling as a long run tendency. However, he acknowledges uneven development within and between industries. (Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, p. 172)

² Thompson makes comparisons between the optimistic picture presented by the early studies of process automation by Blauner (1964), Cotgrove (1972) and Goldthorpe et al (1968) and the later work of Nichols and Beynon (1977) which suggested that work with the new automated processes may be cleaner and less arduous, but it could also be "stressful, lonely and meaningless". Blauner makes reference to the teamwork and problem-solving aspects of process work but work by Hill, 1981, pp. 97-98 shows that such skills are no longer required as plant becomes more sophisticated.

(Thompson, "The Labour Process and Deskilling", p. 12 and p. 73.

R. Blauner, Alienation and Freedom, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964).

S. Cotgrove, "Alienation and Automation", British Journal of Sociology, (December 1972).

J. H. Goldthorpe et al, The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

T. Nichols and H. Beynon, Living with Capitalism: Class Relations in the Modern Factory, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).)

³ The Brighton Labour Process group take care to point out that this last aspect of deskilling is only a tendency. Their argument accepts that:

"The extent to which capital fragments unskilled labour (or reduces the time cycle of operations of each individual worker) is determined by the way in which those tasks are integrated with each other and with ancillary tasks." (Brighton Labour Process Group, "The Capitalist Labour Process", p. 19.)

⁴ See also: C. Wright Mills, White Collar, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 220.

⁵ See also John Holloway's explanation of the crisis of Fordism and its resolution, symbolised by the opening of the Nissan Plant in Sunderland which heralded the shift to a new trend referred to as neo-Fordism or post-Fordism. Fordism as exemplified by British Leyland is an example of bureaucratic control described by Edwards and in part the situation in the United States described by Burawoy. As Holloway explains:

"The pattern of domination established over the post-war period was based on channelling the anger arising from the experience of exploitation in the work-place through trade union organisation into the ritual process of collective bargaining for annual increased in wages. The position accorded to the trade unions both recognised the strength of the organised working class and sought to use that organised strength to contain working class revolt. . . .In the later 1960s/mid-1970s, this pattern of domination came into crisis. On the one hand, it was no longer successful in containing resistance; on the other, the inherent instability of the capital relation drove capital to seek major changes in the organisation of the production process." (J. Holloway, "Red Rose of Nissan", (Paper presented to a Conference of Socialist Economists, Sheffield City Polytechnic, Sheffield, 10-12 July, 1987 - pre-conference papers).

The new approach typified by arrangements at the new Nissan plant aimed at a "non-conflictual environment within the factory" through careful selection of workers, encourages worker involvement in the company and greater commitment. Both management and workers dress alike and use the same canteen and trade union influence is muted.

This new style of management, it is suggested, appears softer than the "hard aggressive phase" of Fordism, but the implication is that the underlying impulse is the same.

⁶ Work humanisation is sometimes associated with the term responsible autonomy and responsible autonomy is sometimes used to encompass job redesign as well as 'human relations' type innovations such as "counselling, improvements in social relations, the stimulation of intergroup competition, suggestions schemes, participation" and quality circles. However, as Wood and Kelly point out job redesign and human relations practices do not always coincide. (S. Wood and J. Kelly, "Taylorism, Responsible Autonomy and management Strategy" in The Degradation of Work?: Skill, Deskilling and the Labour Process, ed. S. Wood (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 83.)

CHAPTER 10

THE IMPACT OF THE RETRAINING EXPERIENCE ON PERCEPTIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

"My mam always said there is never anyone better than you. . . . I am a tradesman, and they look down on the labourers and the management look down on the tradesmen and the bosses look down on the management. I just want to make a few bob and that's all." (Interview with student: 13 May, 1986)

This chapter is about individuals making a transition from one stage in their lives to another. One of the aims of the research was to discover the ways in which retraining intervened in people's lives. To discover if it altered their outlook on life or changed their lives in material ways.

Retraining intervened in the lives of the students at West Biscop in a more obvious way than the enterprise specific retraining did for the trainees. The reason being that the college actually provided, and was concerned to provide, general competency focused retraining, not skills specific provision, as in the case of retraining in industry. For this reason this chapter focuses on the students at West Biscop College, but reference is made to the trainees where appropriate.

For an adult, embarking on a retraining programme is essentially a gamble. Will the individual be able to complete the course, will it provide what he/she is looking for, and ultimately will it lead to a job. Although, it might better be described as a calculated risk. It also means experimenting with new occupational identities. Skill and job identity are central considerations and this chapter attempts to correlate this with the trainees and students assumptions about social class, about their own position in a particular model of the class system, and how they perceived any changes subsequent to retraining.

For the trainees in industry, retraining was part and parcel of employment. There was freedom to opt for or against retraining, but circumstances were such that the choice was not a real one. The opportunity to retrain was presented to them, they were selected, they were not required to seek out retraining. They were trained on the job, and the retraining was designed to equip them to perform a specific job on completion. For the students at West Biscop, training was the key to employment. Only a few left existing employment to retrain at the college, but these jobs were generally regarded as 'dead end' with little in the way of prospects for the future. The degree of choice was greater for these students, although there seemed to be little alternative if they wished to create a better life for themselves and their families. Uniquely these

students had to use initiative, to go out and seek retraining, make enquiries, attend interviews, and more often than not, live away from home for the duration of the retraining. The obvious conclusion suggests that the college students were more highly motivated.

It can, with some certainty, be said that all trainees, whether in industry or in college, expected their skill level to increase as a direct result of retraining. However the students at West Biscop could not rely on securing employment where those 'skills in the man' would be combined with 'skill in the job'. (Cockburn, 1985(b), p. 133) They nonetheless demonstrated carefully considered notions of the type of employment they were seeking. The problem presented itself as looking from a known present to an unknown future, and statements about the future were necessarily speculative and reflected idealisations of possible scenarios. These hopes for the future carried with them ideas concerning jobs which offered more responsibility, greater autonomy and fulfilment, and higher salaries which would in turn lead to improved material lifestyles. They did not seek to improve their class position in the sense of moving from working to middle class. This is particularly interesting since for two groups of students retraining would potentially offer them entry into middle class, that is non-manual, jobs. In the case of two other groups of students, whose average age was around 24, the retraining embarked them on a path which could, given certain career decisions lead them into middle class jobs. This did not apply in the case of the trainees or the one remaining group of students.

As stated earlier, the trainees were already in employment, working for chemical or engineering companies. Their training was generally part of modernisation strategies and involved training in the use of computerised tools and processes and/or training for multi-skilling. The students were on courses ranging in length up to a full academic

year. One course trained in joinery craft skills, another electrical technician skills, and the remaining three prepared individuals for work in the building trade. Two of these courses were designed to retrain building craftsmen for technical or middle management positions as estimator/surveyors or building site managers respectively. The final course sought to provide mainly building craftsmen with the basics for running a small building proprietorship.

THE MEANING OF WORK AND SKILL IDENTITY

The notion of occupational as well as class identity is central to this chapter since, in undergoing retraining, the students and trainees were either trying to maintain or enhance their current employment situations and thus their occupational identities. The aim was to discover just what occupational or skill identity meant to these people.

At the outset it can be said that an individual's personal identity is closely tied up with his/her occupational identity because, as Richard Brown explains:

". . . a person's identity, his or her sense of who they are, derives from their occupation, their place in the division of labour, the more or less distinctive paid employment they undertake to earn a living."

However, he goes on to make the point that:

". . . jobs differ in the extent to which they offer the possibility of a strong sense of occupational identity, and they differ too in the sort of occupational identity they offer." (Brown, 1985, p. 463)

Brown also points out that, some occupations, particularly skilled occupations elicit from their incumbents a greater sense of identity with the job, for example, coal mining (Denis, Henriques and Slaughter 1965, p. 73, quoted in Brown, 1985, p. 464), heavy engineering (Pyke, 1982, p. 49 quoted in Brown, 1985, p. 465) and shipbuilding (Eldridge, 1968, p. 93 quoted in Brown, 1985, p. 464; Brown and Bannen, 1970(a); 1970(b) quoted in Brown, 1985, p. 464). These particular occupations may carry with them a strong sense of identity perhaps because of the skill content of the work which takes several years of apprenticeship to acquire.

Some of the trainees and students were already aware of status differentials based on skill, as this shop steward and process worker pointed out:

"I think craftsmen look down on process people. As a process worker all you are is a general labourer because you have no qualifications. The craftsmen treat you as if you are some sort of subnormal person and they tend to look down on you. They do not like to mix. I do not think they like to see you creeping into their domain." (Interview: 3 February, 1987)

The view from the other side was slightly different. The skilled men thought that the status distinctions were minimal, the only real distinctions were in the pay packet at the end of the day, the amount of responsibility, and the opportunity for re-employment, as an electrical engineering student explained:

"Having a skill gives you more scope for getting a job when you become unemployed. Management don't really treat you any different. Because I am a skilled bloke on contracting I have had mates work with me who are unskilled and you treat them just as one of the lads. You do not think about them as being any different. Most of the time they do the same job as you anyway. You are maybe responsible if anything is wrong. They can pick up the job easily, you just tell them what to do." (Interview: 13 October, 1986)

Status differences were rarely acknowledged as real, particularly in the building industry, although it may be felt to exist by some unskilled workers, as an ex-construction site labourer explained:

"Unskilled people are not really looked down upon but if you are unskilled you feel as though you are. Before I was a bricklayer I used to labour for bricklayers and you always felt inferior to bricklayers, but bricklayers do not think that." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Three students at West Biscop college offered by way of example of co-operation amongst skilled and unskilled on a construction site, the interdependent relationship between the bricklayer and his hod carrier. This is just one example:

"A lot of 'me mates' from the B class are in the same boat. They can do their particular job and they are good at it, hod carrying or whatever. A mate I went through school with was carrying the hod for me. I will drop out and carry for him if the going gets too heavy. You cannot lay bricks if they are not there can you?" (Interview: 13 May, 1985)

Thus the divisive situation which Penn describes, where:

"The nonskilled are seen as beyond the pale of skilled work and a danger to the boundaries of skilled occupations themselves. . . . They are considered inferior but potentially dangerous." (Penn, 1986, pp. 167-8)

is inappropriate in this instance. Even without the need to suppress "the divergent conflictual occupational divisions" in the light of a "shared antagonism with management", (Ibid., p. 168) these students and trainees described a much more contradictory relationship nearer to that outlined by Brown and Brannen, which they saw as generated by the work situation itself:

"Attitudes of skilled men towards non-skilled men are characterized on the one hand by a form of paternalism, especially in the relationship between skilled men and their helpers, and on the other by a determination to protect their work from the encroachment of the semi-skilled and unskilled workers." (Brown and Brannen, 1970(b), p. 203)

Very rarely did these people talk about skill protection and skill demarcation. It was discussed more fully by trainees in industry and those who had experience of skill centre craft training. However, the attitude of the students, most of whom had employment experience in the construction industry tended to minimise skill distinctions.

The relative interest of students and trainees in the occupational identities which accompany diverse occupations is, in part, the concern of this section. However, the picture which emerged was not as might be expected. Certain jobs categorised as middle class or white collar are commonly assumed to carry with them more prestige than manual jobs, and this reflects on the individual who occupies such positions. In this same sense, Sofer suggests that:

"Jobs are the accepted evidence that one can put oneself over and at the same time furnish the means whereby other things significant in life may be procured." (Sofer, 1970, p. 42)

These significant things in life are more than just the material rewards, they may represent status which is perceived to accompany these material rewards:

"Occupational identities contain an implicit reference to the person's position in the larger society, specifying the position appropriate for a person doing such work or which has become possible for him by virtue of his doing such work." (Ibid., p. 48)

The desire for status was not, however, generally evident when talking to the trainees, except perhaps for one foreman in industry and only two students at West Biscop. Jason, for example, a student on the Building Site Manager's Course stated clearly that he was ambitious for power and prestige:

"I want to be in charge of people and not have anyone over me. I want to be able to make my own decisions and plot my future. I get satisfaction. Feeling of authority. I felt like that before I came on the course. Always felt myself superior." (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

For others, status, if it came, was said to be a bonus, but not something to be coveted. Rather a job needed to be satisfying and worthwhile and particularly for those over 35 years of age, within their physical capabilities. As this individual who had worked all his life in the building industry pointed out:

"My ambition is in five or ten years time to say right, I can run the business. I came off the tools because I wanted to. . . . In the building trade you can go on the tools until you are forty and after forty you start going backwards, start to drop back and you can't keep the money up. By the time I am forty I want to be coming off the tools and employing someone else to do it for me. It is my ambition to run the firm and not go on the tools. I had an accident about nine or ten years ago and even now I suffer with a bad back in the winter . . . it is rare that you see a guy on piecework after forty-five or fifty. He has usually got a foreman's job or something like that." (Interview: 3 July, 1986)

These factors together with adequate monetary reward made for the perfect job. Despite the general denial of the importance of status to these individuals, it may still be important, but in a sense that is peculiar to people who have had a particular set of life experiences.

A GOOD JOB

In offering speculative projections into the long term future, the ambitions of both students and trainees were generally modest and rational with a high degree of realism. There were, of course, one or two exceptions, for example this man in his early twenties who wished to embark on a career as an independent builder:

"I want to be a millionaire. I am playing the high stakes." (Interview: 8 May, 1986)

Rather more realistic and typical was this response from an individual on the same course:

"I am going into general contracting, housing building, extensions, patching up. I would let the business grow to about half a million, that would do me. After that I will retire. I would not have to go out to work, I would not do a lot. I race pigeons so that is what I would do with myself. I would not like it to change my lifestyle but I would like to know I had steady money coming in." (Interview: 4 July, 1986)

Brown and Brannen asked their shipyard apprentices what they thought would be a "good job". They responded giving priority to good pay, security of employment and future prospects. (Brown and Brannen, 1970(a), pp. 71-84)

Security to varying degrees depending upon family responsibilities, was also of primary importance for students and trainees in this study. Unemployment was a very real threat for all, as this trainee implied when he was asked about his work career to date:

"I was ambitious when I was at my other job. I worked my way up from a sweeper-upper at TGN and as an operator and a senior operator and then as relief supervisor. I was very ambitious. Then you get the ladder kicked away from you and it knocks you back a little bit." (15 June, 1987)

The freedom to do the job as they wanted to do it was important to some of the students. Some expressed the view that management had insufficient experience and knowledge to manage effectively, made faulty decisions and interfered with the work process:

"I have often found on site that the bosses won't take a chance and make a decision. It comes back on the lad on site and he ends up making the decisions most times. You ask him [the boss] and he will say I'll look that up and you ask him again and he says the same until in the end you end up making a decision yourself. They forget, but it happens too many times for it to be forgetfulness only." (Interview: 4 July, 1986)

Several of the students on the Small Building Business Course echoed these feelings. Self-employment offered an escape from such constraints, or when unorthodox methods of getting the job done did not correlate with management's view of how a site should operate, as this student explained:

"I went on site to look after a job because this chap had fallen ill. I was looking after the structural side of it and we had a really heavy downpour of rain. We had just laid some concrete, external concrete, over quite a large area which was going to be hardstanding for buses. Then a big hole opened up in the concrete. It was about six foot deep and about 15 square metres in area. We did not realise that there was a void under the area we had been concreting, and with the weight of the concrete and the rain, it just sank. I jumped down into the hole myself to see what was going on, and one of the head boys, a contract manager, arrived on site. He started giving me the verbal . . . "What's happened, what's happened." So I climbed out of this hole. It was absolutely throwing it down and I was soaking wet and covered in concrete. After I got the guys working he said to me, "You don't do it like that". I just turned round and threatened to throw him down the hole. About two weeks later I was up in front of a disciplinary committee." (Interview: 13 May, 1986)

Many of the self-employed craftsmen in Scase and Goffee's study also sought autonomy in self-employment. (Scase and Goffee, 1981)

When asked which jobs they would hate to be assigned trainees and students generally agreed that these would be jobs which carried no responsibility or were monotonous or dirty. Of those who answered this question in a straight forward manner, most pointed out that jobs which carried a low wage or were insecure would be avoided, and one student said he would decline a job which was heavily manual. (Interview: 11 March, 1987) Few actual jobs were mentioned as 'hate jobs' just dishwashing or street cleaning and one individual would avoid coal mining at all costs. (Interview: 3 February, 1987) This was because they were either boring, as in the first two examples, or could be unpleasant, rather than being of low status. Two individuals, however, preferred to answer this question another way by stating that they would take

any work so long as either the money was good or it was all that was available to them and they needed it to survive. (Interview: 11 March, 1987)

This confirms the findings generally, that these individuals were keen to improve their occupational position in terms of income, comfort and enjoyment of their work. It is difficult to say from this whether occupational identification was particularly strong in these two groups. They were not overly concerned about status, and did not always see jobs in class terms, whilst acknowledging that those individuals who wore suits for work must be managers and therefore middle class.

SOCIAL CLASS IDENTITY

Sociological literature offers two basic models¹ of the blue collar worker orientations to social consciousness. The first is Lockwood's proletarian traditionalism where class structure is perceived in terms of a "us" and "them" "power" model. (Lockwood, 1966) Within this model striving to improve one's social position is spurned as futile, and aspirations for children are limited to those of the parents. Finally, work satisfies "workers' expressive and affective, as well as their instrumental needs" and solidarity and trade union support are strong. (Brown and Brannen, 1970(a), p. 76)

The second model is that of the "affluent worker", suggested by Goldthorpe, and based on a study of high income car workers at Luton. Although the study refuted the embourgeoisement thesis, these workers displayed a less marked traditional proletarian social imagery than Lockwood's model suggests. The embourgeoisement thesis rests

on the assumption that as workers become more secure economically they will assimilate middle class values and life styles. (Goldthorpe et al, 1968)²

The workers in this study came much nearer to the affluent workers of Luton, although models of class structure varied and were sometimes contradictory. As with the shipyard apprentices studied by Brown and Brannen a hierarchical model rather than a power model was more common although Brown and Brannen's apprentices showed feelings of antagonism towards top management. The shipyard workers generally displayed some individualistic middle class attitudes, although the responses varied depending on the specific questions asked. (Ibid., pp. 80-81)

What then were, in detail, the views which the students at West Biscop and the trainees in industry held of the class system and their place within it? They tended towards denial of class divisions or stated a preference to ignore it altogether, (Interview with student: 13 October, 1987) perhaps this was because in accepting the existence of a class system, they were also reinforcing it and imputing some virtue to being a member of a particular class, which, by definition devalues members of other classes. Around one quarter of those interviewed at West Biscop offered this type of response:³

"I do not think social class is important. I look at the person in terms of the quality of the person and irrespective of his background. If he is prepared to listen to my arguments, my opinions. If he is prepared to show respect towards me I am equally prepared to show respect to him. . . . I do not like to be talked down to." (Interview: 13 October, 1986)

Most students felt that class was unimportant to them, although some, like Clive for instance, conceded reluctantly and inadvertently that notions of class informed the way he related to a particular group of individuals:

"I have thought about social class before, but don't think it is important. I play rugby and when we come across teams who look down on us because they think we are a works team We play against

Stourbridge. They are all directors and lawyers, and I don't like getting beat. We are quite prepared to talk to them afterwards but they won't talk to us." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Most said they never thought about it much, although they acknowledged its existence; or they acknowledged differences between people but preferred not to think of these as class differences. Maybe because individuals are encouraged to think of Britain as a meritocratic society, the persistence of class differences is an embarrassment, it suggests individual failure to make good. Or did these students and trainees see beyond what they believed to be the superficial trappings of class?

It is probably safe to assume that, despite some denials, in general these individuals viewed society in class terms. There is some suggestion of a power model but the fact that the middle class life style at least was perceived as accessible, suggests a more hierarchical model. It is interesting, however, that this accessible middle class life style was generally seen in terms of money and material possessions, in the size of car a person drove and in the type of clothing they wore at work. Such social distinctions were visible on the building site as one student explained in a relatively objective fashion:

"When I was working on site I noticed that all the people on the site hated the people in the company cars and the suits because they were earning them money. They were not doing anything as far as you could see and you were building the structures and making the profit and they have nice cars and suits. There is a lot of animosity and mainly it is because you do not understand what they are doing. . . . It looks like exploitation but it is not like that because people in offices are performing a function, although they may be getting too much money for it." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

Money was decidedly the rod that divided those who controlled from those who laboured, as these two individuals pointed out:

"A company director is not working class, he owns some of the company. Those with money and position and those with power . . .

. Power goes with position and that goes with money. You have automatically got power if you have money." (Interview: 6 October, 1986)

"There is class distinction. There has got to be I suppose. It is just money. If you have money, money talks anywhere. It is upbringing and background. Who would you employ, someone from a council estate or someone from a private school?" (Interview: 6 October, 1986)

Only a few viewed the differences in terms of unequal educational opportunity. Although, given the value which the vast majority of these individuals placed on education and training, if it were mentioned as a possibility, the general tenor of interviews suggests they would accept this as a very real difference. One shop steward, for example, who with his trade union colleagues was locked in combat with management, acknowledged the power which education could provide:

"I wish I was his [the manager's] dad, then I would have a good education and could argue with him on his own terms." (Interview: 3 February, 1987)

With only five exceptions the students and trainees regarded themselves as working class, mainly because of their family backgrounds and sometimes their lifestyles; as illustrated in these two quotations from interviews:

"I suppose class is a label which you could not help acquiring. Even if it is not supposed to exist, it does unofficially. It depends on what you do, where you live, how you speak. That all contributes to it. People unconsciously put you into a class. I suppose I do it with people. I can't help it. I would put myself in the working class. I have worked in a factory situation. My father worked in a factory. I speak with a funny accent." (Interview: 20 October, 1986)

"I consider myself working class. My life style might be considered quite plebian really, my pursuits are not those of the cricket playing gin and tonic brigade. I enjoy a beer, I ride a motorcycle." (Interview: 13 October, 1987)

Those few who saw themselves as middle class were living what might commonly be regarded as a middle class life style, and at times with the income to support it.

Sometimes they openly expressed themselves as ambitious for more than just the income they associated with being middle class. Peter, for example, had clearly defined views of what he wanted for himself and his family, and he felt that managing his own business might provide the opportunity he needed:

"I want out of life what other people have. Not financially, but I want the life style. I have always tried if possible to go up rather than backwards." (Interview: 8 May, 1986)

These few people who saw themselves as middle class often expressed less than complimentary views of the working class, although these were always qualified when referring to individuals whom they knew personally; for example:

"I suppose I am middle class. I like to have a reasonable standard of living. When the children get older I would like them to have a reasonable standard of education rather than be drop outs and get on in life. Some husbands spend their leisure time on the beer - that is working class. I am not like that. I suppose my parents were between working and middle class. My dad was a driver on the railway and my mum never worked I never resent not being further up the social scale. It is down to you if you are capable you will get up. I do not condemn anyone either at the top or bottom. If they have worked at it and worked their way up I can respect them." (Interview: 13 September, 1986)

To a degree even those who regarded themselves as working class had assimilated some middle class values like career advancement and self-improvement and were ambitious to enter jobs which they identified as traditionally middle class as this quotation illustrates:

"I do want to get a better job and get on the management side where the benefits are better. All work is money first. It is not all money, but it comes first. It is no good having a good job if you cannot live how you want to, that is not for me. I want the holidays and the cars. . . . Although I am not class conscious I think the course will give me a higher standing socially. I do not think I am a social climber but I like a decent standard of living. I do not 'hob nob' with people because of who they are." (Interview 30 September, 1986)

With a few exceptions, and as illustrated above, this ambition was spurred by the opportunity of material gain. The status that such jobs might also provide was minimally regarded. This equates with the view previously expressed by the students at West Biscop which divides people into classes in accordance with the degree of material benefits to which they had access. Ambition for these students and for the trainees invariably meant providing for their families:

"I am extremely ambitious. I am not ambitious for real success as I have been. I am more ambitious to raise my standard of living. To be financially secure. . . . At the moment material things are most important to me. At a future date having a steady relationship with someone who can understand what I have to do and cope with that. Children are important too." (Interview: 29 January, 1987)

"You want money really don't you. You cannot do a lot without money; and more security for your family. My kids can then have what they want. If they want to go to private school then I will send them. . . . I don't think it is deserting my roots. I am even thinking of moving out here and getting a council house." (Interview: 6 October, 1986)

As an aid to assessing how individuals saw themselves in social class terms they were asked for their views on trade unionism, support for trade unions being assumed to be strong in the type of traditional working class community described by Lockwood (Lockwood, 1966) Their political views were also ascertained through a less obtuse form of questioning.

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP

The responses from both groups about trade union membership followed a similar pattern, although there were exceptions. The majority had joined trade unions in the past, with about half of them joining because of closed shop arrangements in the

company or on the site where they worked. Two of those who did not join a trade union felt they were necessary. With the exception of the shop stewards who were interviewed, only two talked of themselves as activists. Again the majority felt that working people needed unions and two people mentioned their concern about the effects of anti-union legislation. Unions were believed to meet a need because they represented collective strength which would champion the cause of the employee against the employer. This was neatly put by one individual:

"I believe in unions because there are always times when everyone needs a stronger bat than they can put up resistance themselves."
(Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Even amongst those who professed strong support for trade unions there was a considerable amount of concern over what was described as extremism and the cult of personality, which as one student on the Systems Engineering Course pointed out, may have lost support for trade unions:

"I think trade unions were once very good but they have lost their way. They have definitely lost the measure of support of a lot of the rank and file union members. There is too much personality, too many of the union leaders are trying to build their own empires within the trade union movement. An obvious example is Arthur Scargill." (Interview: 20 October, 1986)

Of those who chose not to join a trade union three complained of the lack of power wielded by trade unions, especially on building sites. On the other hand there were others who thought unions had too much power although this was seen to be weaker than it had been five or ten years ago. People who complained in this way were usually able to give an example from their own experience which involved unfair treatment by their trade union, as did this young trainee in a chemical plant:

"I think the unions have too much control. In this factory the unions used to have too much control. They chose people for jobs. I think that is bad. I got offered a job on shifts - the manager wanted me for the job. I said yes, I would like it. It was more money and a plant operators job. When I came back from a week's holiday someone else

had got the job. The unions had vetoed me getting the job because I have not been on the jobs as long as this other person had. . . . They keep you down all the time." (Interview: 16 June, 1987)

This person subsequently lost his job. If the expected promotion had gone through, redundancy would have been much less likely.

Brown and Brannen noted the absence of very strong feelings of commitment towards trade unionism amongst the shipbuilding workers in the north east of England. Although, with only a few exceptions, they were members of the trade union, the level of participation in union activities outside of the yard was low. However, they make the important point that such data collected in interview may be misleading since union meetings at the yard commanded almost 100 per cent attendance and they observed certain union issues being discussed with enthusiasm by workers at the shipyard. Brown and Brannen also noted that union involvement in their study was higher than that of the affluent workers in the Luton study.⁴ This was not unexpected, since trade union involvement is generally found to be higher amongst skilled than semi- and unskilled workers.

The responses suggested that the rhetoric of support for trade unions was high, yet experiences in the workplace, for example unfair treatment or lack of 'clout' on construction sites, meant that practical support was not strong. The the impact of the anti-union publicity in newspapers and on TV was also leaving an impression, especially on those who had little experience of trade unions. The very fact that the students had taken the initiative in seeking out employment and those trainees who were interviewed were ambivalent or acquiescent towards reduced union representation, suggests that these people are likely to look to individual rather than collective solutions to employment difficulties.

POLITICS

Despite a strong streak of individualism, there was little support for Thatcherism and the Conservative Party amongst the trainees and students. Concern about the high level of unemployment was a major reason given and this response was typical:

"They look at unemployment as a price to pay, right? To try to make their economic policies work, but it is a price they are not having to pay. It is the old backs to the grindstone, but it is our backs not their's. Their policies will never work, they will get booted out at the next general election." (Interview: 12 May, 1986)

Only four people voiced support for Conservative Party policies, one of whom had held a position in management for some years prior to embarking on his course. As many people expressed disappointment in the Labour Party as in the Tory Party, although most of these implied that they would vote Labour in preference. Only two stated that they were SDP supporters and two individuals admitted to not voting at all. Without prompting three people expressed a keen interest in politics and current affairs generally, whilst another four were quite adamant about their lack of concern with the world outside of their job and immediate family. An unsystematic survey was done of the newspapers students and trainees read, and no one openly admitted to buying the Sun, although the students, at least, clearly read it since courses were advertised in that newspaper. Generally they offered scathing comments with regard to its value as a newspaper:

"Working class people, how they can buy and sit and read the Sun is beyond me. None of my mates are that daft. It is such a vile foul newspaper to me and it is the biggest selling newspaper in the country. How working class I don't like to use that term . . . working people cannot suss that out - I just despair" (Interview: 12 May, 1986)

"I do not like the Sun, it is just toilet paper. The Mirror is a little bit better, but not much. At least it is a Labour paper. " (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

On the whole they preferred the Daily Mirror, although there were concerns about the moral tone of the contents and two said they read the Guardian regularly. One purchased the Financial Times to keep track on his share investments.

Everyone who was asked whether their political views would change as a consequence of retraining and moving into another type of employment was convinced they would not, with the exception of one person who stated that he might have to compromise some views, although basically there would be little change. Any changes that had occurred had taken place long before retraining. Three individuals said that they now voted Conservative when they used to be firm Labour voters and one individual said he would vote for whoever gave the best deal at a particular time:

"I do not have any political beliefs. I vote for whoever is going to give me the best deal. . . . I look after me. . . .I voted Conservative at the last election because I was self-employed and they did the best for me. I am paying next to nothing in tax - that is if you work it right." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

THE EFFECT OF THE RETRAINING EXPERIENCE

When asked how they saw their lives changing in the longer term once they have completed their training and took up the new career the responses were mixed. Mainly they referred to the knowledge they had gained and the confidence which grows as a result of having that knowledge. This student on the Small Building Business Course expressed it well:

"The course has not changed my ideas or attitudes towards myself. I don't see how it can. . . . They say that to you when you come on the

course, but during the course they give you the facts and the procedures and knowing that makes you more confident. But the course itself does not try to make you a more confident person, that is more a by-product." (Interview: 2 July, 1986)

For the Building Site Managers and for those planning to run their own business this confidence would now enable them to negotiate on equal terms with individuals who might previously have intimidated them. These were people occupying quite clearly defined middle class jobs such as architects and lawyers, or those already well established in business:

"You assume everyone knows what to do when they are in business. Now I know that they don't. Now I have the knowledge to know that they are not as bright as I might have thought they were. You always think when you see a businessman driving around in a flashy car, he must have a good headpiece and you worry about pricing up jobs and you try to keep as low as you can, but now I won't. Now I will say I am not going to work for wages only, I want to make some profit." (Interview: 4 July, 1986)

Almost to a man, however, they felt they had not changed, nor would they change their attitudes and outlook in any way. The only changes they sought in their lives were material, as these extracts from interviews illustrate:

"I do not think I will change socially. My roots will stay the same although I may change my standard of living and if it is middle class that is what is going to happen. I think you have to be born middle class. Education, family background and so on makes a person middle class. I still think my roots are important and that tells me that I am working class and will die working class." (Interview: 29 January 1987)

"I think that going into management will not change the way I see the world. At the first interview I said I am probably middle class. I think I misinterpreted what middle class really meant. I have just thought out that question more I suppose. I think I am like everyone else. I would like to have a fair wage coming in and live fairly comfortably. Little extras like a holiday and a nice car and that is about all." (Interview: 11 March 1987)

"Class does not bother me at all. If I ever get a well paid job I do not think I will become a different person. . . . I do not think living in a different neighbourhood can change you as a person - not me anyway. I will just have to see. I have no ambitions to have a big house although I would like a decent motor." (Interview 20 October, 1986)

Hidden within these statements and in casual conversation with students it was possible to discern that there might be some attitudinal change, but this would be mainly a rationalisation process and would be, essentially, in terms of approach to the job, rather than changes in values and beliefs. Hence confidence was important to the Building Site Managers and Small Building Businessmen to enable them to play the role without compromising their real selves too much:

"I don't think I will change. Your work attitude has to change. You go into a different work atmosphere as opposed to being on site but you have to be more proper because it is expected, it is custom and practice. You will be mixing with different people. I may behave differently, but it is not going to change me, not a drastic change. . . . I am working class. I do not think I will be middle class in attitude but in theory I will be middle class. I will be earning more money and have a different life style. I won't try to grab on to my working class roots, but becoming middle class is not important to me." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

During the first two weeks of the course this Building Site Management student who described himself as 'a bit of a lefty' foresaw the need for some change:

"I have working class roots. At the moment I am working class. I would hate to think I was middle class. I think I go through the motions. They are teaching us in this class how to make men do what we want and avoid trouble. I have always thought that management were in the wrong. Obviously I am going to have to compromise my ideals. It would not have been a problem some years ago but now it is just a matter of money. I have got to find a proper career with a secure job. . . . What people I have had working for me have all been friends I had always known I should have treated people working for me harder. I did not want to fall out with them." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

Made much more explicit was the acute awareness on the part of those who were hoping to move into middle management positions or run their own business of the need to create and maintain distance between themselves and those who would take instructions from them. Those who would occupy the positions they had once

occupied. This same person quoted below firmly denied that he would be anything else but working class for the rest of his life. And yet, he stated clearly without thought of compromise that:

"You have to be independent. You can never mix with your own people. If you move up you have to move up and cut all ties. Not a lot of people can do that. The higher up you go, the higher the circle of people you should mix with. You should look at joining the Rotary Club and that gives you more good business contacts. I am prepared to do that although I don't like the Rotary Club. . . . You need to talk to people on their level so I'll have to change my accent." (Interview 7 January, 1987)

But those who had worked as site foremen had dealt with this problem previously and would continue to behave as they had done in the past. They had learned nothing new from the course in this respect:

"I do not think the course is going to change me. I think I can handle anything that comes along. If I am invited to a party by an engineer or an architect I can sit there with the best and discuss matters. If I am working with some of the lads on site there is no problem about me going for a pint with them. I always keep one step away from them anyway so when I am a site manager it will be no different. I always wear a tie to make that distinction." (Interview: 30 September, 1986)

This further suggests a willingness to act out a management role but a reluctance to lose sight of working class origins. Enthusiasm for retraining was stronger amongst the younger employees in all of the companies studied. They were the one's with the young families and the large mortgages, and also a longer working future ahead of them. However, it may be fair to say that older employees were possibly more opposed to other changes which accompanied the retraining than the retraining itself, for example the loss of trade union recognition, and trade union commitment was generally held to be strongest amongst those in older age groups. Various explanations were offered by management and the younger trainees themselves. One such explanation suggested rather unkindly that the middle-aged men were more 'set

in their ways'. (Interview with trainee: 16 June, 1987)

This is explained rather more sympathetically by Sofer, when discussing the type of problems which might be experienced by an individual in an executive position, as an 'inability to divest him of his occupational identity'. This same explanation can be applied usefully to skilled workers. Sofer goes on to explain that:

"He has committed himself to an occupational identity in his own eyes and those of others. Since any occupational role involves relations with others, commitment to an occupation is simultaneously commitment to an image of himself that he feels obliged to sustain . . . a disruption of this coincidence is likely to cause internal stress in his whole framework for judging himself, especially in relation to others." (Sofer, 1970, p. 70)

There is also the fear of failing, which is associated with having established oneself in a certain position. Failure results in that occupational identity being shattered.

On all the courses at West Biscop College students, but particularly the younger men in their early twenties, saw the retraining course as a second chance:

"I am now ambitious but I was not a couple of years ago. I realised I was getting nowhere. I wanted to be a quantity surveyor, a job with money, prestige and security. Prestige means standing in society. This was not important before but I need to get something under my belt now." (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

This view point generally corresponded with personal circumstances like a young family or a new girlfriend and suddenly life consisted of a whole new set of priorities.

"I left school with a few qualifications and it seemed the right thing to do to learn a trade. I suppose my dad never really had a trade of his own, but I was never really pushed. . . . Security never used to be important to me but now, as I am getting a bit older . . . I have a regular girlfriend and we are engaged. I want to settle down eventually. (Interview: 8 January, 1987)

Security to marry, raise a family and take on a mortgage influenced the trainees in industry in the same way.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction students and trainees arrived at retraining via different routes. This meant that the students had a much clearer idea of their motives for retraining. The motives of the few trainees who were interviewed are examined in greater detail in Chapter 9. This chapter is therefore about the students rather than the trainees, although interview data from trainees has been included where appropriate and where it supports conclusions which apply to both groups.

Despite the tendency to deny the importance or even the existence of class divisions, these people clearly held a model of society based on an unequal distribution of resources. It came nearer to Goldthorpe's hierarchical model. But it did not consist of clearly defined stages each with particular characteristics. It was rather more fluid. Their view of society was clearly hierarchical because they acknowledged distinctions between groups of people and believed that it was possible to improve their own individual positions in this hierarchy. This improvement was to be gained through individual effort, thus their decision to retrain.

This same preference to minimise or by-pass class distinctions was observed in their attitudes towards status distinctions between skilled and unskilled workers. Distinctions were acknowledged, but made little of by the students who had worked in skilled

trades, especially in the construction industry. Although skill was important since skill was the means by which they could obtain their livelihood, it was not clear how much they identified with either skill or occupation. All those who possessed a skill expressed pleasure and satisfaction in the execution of their trade but in general terms there was no sense in which their whole personal identity was tied up with the skill. Many of them had experienced long periods of unemployment, from a few weeks to over a year, and the aspect of unemployment which bothered them most was not loss of occupational identity but the loss of income.

Divisions within society were seen in terms of money and material possessions, and they had a clear view that the retraining course would or should lead to material changes in their lives. They denied they were seeking status in society. Perhaps what they were denying was the status associated with the type of educated middle class professional with whom they had already come into contact in the course of their working lives. This would mean a rejection of their working class roots and their current personal identities. They sought status to a degree, but with limited scope. They sought status within the workplace so that they could carry out their work effectively. What they really sought was security for themselves and their families and a standard of material wellbeing which they believed would be entitled to them through regular work.

The almost universal condemnation of Thatcherism and 'The Sun' newspaper indicated an unwillingness to be 'led by the nose'. These were people with a strong sense of their own individuality who wanted to weigh up the facts and carve out their own place in the world. This is reflected in their reluctance to accept a class system as given or mobility within that system as necessarily desirable. Yet they recognised what they

observed as the objective indications of wealth and affluence, and they believed themselves entitled to a share.

The aspirations of these people had been formed prior to commencing retraining and the experience of retraining did not alter these aspirations in any noticeable way. These aspirations were not based on status or social class but based on the desire for a secure, interesting and fulfilling occupation which would provide a moderate material standard of living. The retraining taught them facts and showed them how to conduct themselves in given situations. These skills, once learned, provided them with the confidence they needed to compete on equal terms with others in order to fulfill those aspirations.

NOTES

¹ There are other models, see for example "Working Class Images of Society", edited by Martin Bulmer.

² The Lockwood and Goldthorpe studies are used as exemplars and it is recognised that the debates may have developed since 1966 and 1968 respectively.

³ In their study of Skill Centre Trainees Hall and Miller also found a reluctance to award any importance to class:

"There was a tendency for some members of all the 'workingclass' groups of the research to deny the importance of class in contemporary society; given that British society is certainly more open than it was, say, fifty years ago, such sentiments may make sense. Yet when one consider that few of the interviewees were unwilling to name determinants of 'social class' and very few were thereafter unwilling to rate themselves in the social class structure, the tendency to deny the importance of social class in contemporary Britain by many who did so cannot be taken as face value. Indeed, it would appear reasonable to assume that social class is still significant and that manual workers from a variety of status groups are still well aware of this fact." (Kenneth Hall and Isobel Miller, Retraining and Tradition: The Skilled Worker in an Era of Change, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1975), p. 145.)

⁴ See: John H. Goldthorpe et al, The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) and John H. Goldthorpe et al, The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969).

C H A P T E R 1 1

C O N C L U S I O N

I N T R O D U C T I O N

For the first eight chapters of this thesis industry and further education were treated as two distinct and unrelated entities. Indeed, during the data collection period of the research, they emerged as two unconnected areas where retraining of different sorts was taking place. This transpired principally because, although the college and the companies were in the same broad geographical area, they had no links with each other. Had the research been a study of the two major employers who were based in the same city as the college, a very different picture would have emerged. However, that would have produced a study about one particular college and the unique problems and issues peculiar to those companies and that college, and indeed that particular city. The purpose of the research was instead to draw out features that were unique to a particular type of company undergoing a specific type of change and to draw out features which were unique to certain types of training courses in colleges

of further education. In doing so, the research also attempted to draw out some of the problems and issues faced by further education generally.

Therefore, the research was not so much about particular organisations and the relationship between those organisations and the way that is mediated by government. It was much more about change, about social, economic and political change. The research was about the impact that such change has had on the internal policies of organisations, both industrial and educational; and how those general policies impinged upon, and directly influenced, the decisions made by individuals responsible for implementing training programmes and courses. The theme was taken a stage further in Chapters 9 and 10, which examined, in greater detail, the effect that retraining could have, and in some cases has had, on the lives of individuals who undergo retraining. This is both in terms of the skill content of their occupations and in terms of personal satisfaction, ambition and self-fulfilment.

It has already been explained that there was no actual relationship between the industrial organisations and the college which were discussed in this thesis. However, the thesis has tried to bridge that gap by looking at further education and industry in general terms and ask why and where that general relationship has failed. The conclusion reached is that the breakdown occurred because further education and industry have worked with two differing concepts of what retraining should be about. Further education is organised and structured to provide general competency based skills and training, and is concerned with providing training for industry as a whole. The colleges work with stable views of what skills are about, and as this thesis has shown, skills are continually being socially reconstructed as relationships between worker and employer in the workplace are restructured.

For the newly restructured company training is about teaching the established skills more quickly and in a new form, but it is also about grooming a new type of employee, highly-skilled and committed to his/her work and to the organisation. Employers are interested in enterprise specific skills and the "right" attitudes which commit employees to the organisation. These cannot be achieved through classroom instruction alone, but must be absorbed and internalised as part of the working experience. It is doubtful whether further education is organised to provide this type of training.

The chapter brings together the various elements which make up the thesis. It begins with an examination of some of the major changes which have taken place in British industry over the last decade. This is not meant to be an exhaustive account but merely an attempt to outline those changes which are relevant to this research. There follows an examination of flexibility and multi-skilling, and some discussion of single union agreements which frequently accompany flexibility agreements. It is against this background that industry assesses its retraining requirements and it is against this background that individual workers experience job retraining.

The chapter continues with a look at further education and its future, and finally asks whether further education can change and in which direction. The issue is, if colleges do become more entrepreneurial and do adapt term length and course structures to parallel more closely industry's requirements, will industry begin to utilise the colleges more? Employers are overwhelmingly concerned to have a skilled, compliant and flexible workforce and this may not be achievable ultimately by sending employees to college. That may introduce workers to a whole range of other experiences.

THE CHANGING FACE OF BRITISH INDUSTRY

A report in the Financial Times dated 8 December 1988 claimed a "crippling shortage" of workers with the appropriate skills in certain sectors of industry including retail establishments, banks, manufacturing companies and public sector organisations wishing to implement new technology. There were also reported shortages in printing and the construction industry. (Financial Times, 8 December 1988, p. 15)

This is only one of a whole series of articles which appear regularly in the press detailing the nature and location of skill shortages. These shortages, it is argued, are a symptom of changes which are taking place in British industry, changes which involve the introduction of new technology and so called multi-skilling and flexibility. There are other changes too, for example, in trade union representation and harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment, but one of the most important as far as retraining is concerned is flexibility, that is the restructuring of relationships between worker and manager in industry. All three changes will be examined below.

FLEXIBILITY AND MULTI-SKILLING

Flexibility is linked to the idea of the flexible firm which is generally attributed to Atkinson, although the notion is not new, and is believed to have similarities with the typical Japanese industrial organisation. So flexibility is not just about detailed relationships between workers and managers, it is a whole enterprise concept which has been put forward by Atkinson amongst others.

The basic model, which Atkinson expects will develop more strongly in the future, consists of a core group and two peripheral groups. In Atkinson's words the core group consists of:

" . . . full-time permanent career employees, say manager, designers, technical sales staff, quality control staff, technicians and craftsmen. Their employment security is won at the cost of accepting functional flexibility . . . [and] . . . the central characteristic of this group is their skills cannot readily be bought-in. (Atkinson, 1985, p. 20)

The jobs these people perform will be functionally flexible, that is the duties will not be clearly defined nor will the conditions of work. This means that an employee can be moved from office to factory or from one type of work to another depending upon the needs of the enterprise at a particular time.

Surrounding the core group are the two peripheral groups who are members of the secondary labour market. These workers would be typically part-time or individuals on short-term contracts whose labour may be dispensed with at short notice or with the minimum of disruption to the firm. All the workers within the two peripheral groups have less job security, more routine jobs and little or no access to career opportunities. Many will be shift workers. Numerical rather than functional flexibility is sought here as Atkinson explains:

" . . . lack of career prospects, and systematisation of job content around a narrow range of tasks, together with a recruitment strategy directed particularly at women, encourage a relatively high level of labor turnover, which itself facilitates easy and rapid numerical adjustment to product market uncertainty." (Ibid., p. 20)

The notion of the flexible firm is, however, more a paper concept rather than a reality and has come under some criticism.¹

Despite this, an article which appeared in the Financial Times towards the end of 1988 reported that certain elements of the ideal of the flexible firm were already relatively widespread in industry. This article was based on a report published by the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service following a survey carried out between April and June of 1987. ACAS received 584 responses, 93 per cent of which were from private sector employers. 70 per cent of these employers had achieved numerical flexibility through the use of part-time workers and 25 per cent had achieved functional flexibility.

Of the employers who had achieved functional flexibility, 25 per cent had done so by multi-skilling craftworkers. A further 25 per cent of these companies had retrained their production workers to carry out routine maintenance tasks. In 34 per cent of cases craftsmen did work which was normally done by other craftsmen and 25 per cent of the companies relaxed the divisions between manual, technical and clerical work. (Financial Times, 9 August, 1988, p. 16)

Although a comprehensive survey of the extent of flexibility in British industry is beyond the ambit of this research, a brief examination of some recent literature shows that flexibility is not as extensive as this report would suggest.² It appears that across British industry the introduction of flexible work practices tends to be both partial and uneven. IDS for example state that where flexibility is introduced it tends to be partial and changes in working practices are sometimes introduced without flexibility agreements being signed. Flexibility can be introduced quickly but as IDS point out the vast majority of companies introduce change slowly over a number of years. (Incomes Data Services Ltd., April 1988, pp. 1-3) In 1986 the IDS reported the greatest change in oil refining and the petrochemical industry, and in more recent years have observed large scale changes taking place in the heavy chemicals industry. (Ibid., p. 3)

The evidence from this research suggests that employers are aiming to multi-skill only portions of their workforces. They are not aiming for the polyvalent, multi-skilled supercraftsman, but rather to retrain employees in peripheral craft areas. Under multi-skilling, the workers discussed in this research will be functionally flexible. They would fit into Atkinsons's core group as multi-skilled craftsmen and technicians.

The introduction of multi-skilling inevitably means the blurring of demarcation lines and raises issues which concern the trade union movement. Another issue for trade unions is the extension of management control over the work process which multi-skilling is indisputably designed to enhance. By adding peripheral skills to an existing core skill, the company hopes to make the most effective use of the workforce by eliminating downtime. IDS point out, however, that in some cases unions have been able to exploit the bargaining opportunities which consequently open up, in order to resist change which may not be in the interests of their members.

SINGLE UNION AGREEMENTS

Another change which affects the employment relationship is the single union agreement. These agreements often accompany and sometimes enable the establishment of flexibility agreements. This issue will be examined since it suggests far reaching changes with important implications for training.

Single union agreements have generally been associated with foreign multi-nationals setting up new plants on greenfield sites, although this is not exclusively the case.

In 1984 the Industrial Relations Review and Report stated that single union agreements were most common in high tech companies and that they generally included comprehensive disputes procedures, consultation programmes and arrangements to harmonise conditions of service. Occasionally "no-strike" clauses were included. This meant that industrial action was forbidden and instead the parties must resort to a stated procedure which was designed to bring both sides to agreement, sometimes resorting to arbitration. (Industrial Relations Review and Report, July 1984, pp. 8-9)

Although, like flexibility agreements, single union agreements are essentially an attempt by management to increase control over the work process by eliminating some of the obstacles to improving output and profitability, they too can be used as bargaining tools by trade unions. A single union agreement has the advantage for management of simplifying the negotiation process, but the opportunity can also be taken by the trade union to improve the material working conditions of its membership.

Problems occur when trade unions do not work in concert with each other and abide by regulations laid down by the TUC³ or where, as pointed out in an article from the Centre for a Working World:

"Capital itself initiates 'competitions' of one form or another between trade unions in a buyers' labour market where management generally holds the whip hand. The 'Wapping Saga' illustrates divisions at their sharpest, union co-operation at its lowest and TUC intervention at its most ineffectual. The role of SUMAs [Single Union Agreements] - the perceptions of such agreements among some trade unionists nationally and locally - remains conditioned by that bitter experience." (Centre for a Working World, July 1988, p. 4)

HARMONISATION OF CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

The third element in this trilogy of change is the move towards harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment. Again such changes generally, but not always, go hand in glove with single union and flexibility agreements. Harmonisation agreements look like attempts to create the illusion that all employees will be treated equally and therefore foster commitment at every level. The Financial Times article mentioned above also gave data on the extent to which companies in the survey had introduced elements of harmonisation into the terms and conditions of employment they offered. For example, 42 per cent had introduced common holiday arrangements for all their employees, 41 per cent offered common car parking; 36 per cent common restaurants; 31 per cent common pension schemes; 27 per cent common sick pay schemes; 18 per cent common working hours. (Financial Times, 9 August, 1988, p. 16)

An important element of this strategy for change is commonly referred to as a new management paradigm, that is the 'mobilisation of consent'. The Incomes Data Services study on flexibility presents evidence to suggest that real change is dependent upon the consent and commitment of both management and workers, and illustrates how companies have attempted to achieve this with varying degrees of success through improved methods of communication, quality circles and/or movement towards the harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment. (Incomes Data Services Ltd., April 1986)

The trend towards greater flexibility in working practices, single union agreements and harmonisation of conditions of service represent the background against which retraining is taking place in industry. Retraining is also an integral part of these

changes and this is discussed in the following section.

ADULT JOB TRAINING IN INDUSTRY

Employers are clear in their motives for introducing flexibility and seeking single union agreements, mainly to increase productivity and reduce labour costs. Alongside this they need the cooperation of the workforce and harmonisation and retraining are means of achieving this.

Along with quality circles and harmonisation of conditions of employment, training can be seen as a means of gaining that co-operation, but not alone. Training is more effective in eliciting co-operation if it is part of a total package, a package that includes changes in working practices and conditions of employment. Training alone can however increase an employee's commitment to the company in that the company has indicated its willingness to invest in the worker and believes him/her to be a valuable employee. In addition, training which is job specific, can bind the worker to the employer in a different way. All the workers interviewed as part of this research believed their new skills would better equip them to move to new employment if and when the opportunity presented itself. It is not possible at this stage, however, to comment on the transferability of their new skills.

Training, therefore, serves a dual purpose. It is essential if workers are to be physically competent to carry out a job of work and it assists in gaining the cooperation and commitment of employees. Training can elicit commitment as described above when

it strengthens that link between the worker and his job by transforming it into something other than the cash nexus. That in part helps form what employers regard as the "right attitudes". But training can only achieve this effectively when it is part of a total package of change. The total package often includes changes in working practices towards greater flexibility and changes in trade union representation. The "right attitudes" cannot be taught through instruction, they need to be absorbed as part of the working experience.

Employers are concerned with developing skill competencies but they are possibly much more concerned with changing attitudes away from a conflictual model to a notion that workers are an integral part of the enterprise. They are concerned with profits and how the workforce is organised so that these profits are not threatened. Workers need skills, but for employers they need certain attitudes too. If these then are the requirements of industry, how can further education meet those requirements, and more importantly what should further education and job retraining be about?

CHANGE AND THE FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE

Private industry is, in part, a consumer of education and training, and further education colleges are just one of a number of different types of providers. However, colleges have not seen themselves traditionally as a part of the market. This has much to do with their historic development, the broad range of training and educational courses they provide, and the nature and source of funding which has undergone some change in recent years. So, if the colleges have been slow to change, it would be incorrect

and unfair to label them complacent, although there may be some elements of this.

There are dilemmas facing further education colleges which cannot be resolved in the short term. These dilemmas broadly concern first, questions about nature and breadth of provision in the light of demographic change and changes in the training requirements of industry and the unemployed, and second, changes in government policy which itself is characterised by a seemingly irresolvable tension between intervention and voluntarism.

Further education has responded to these changes, which came from several sources. First there was the emergence of the Manpower Services Commission, later to become the Training Commission and finally the Training Agency, with its aim of encouraging the greater involvement of private industry in training and retraining. Second, there was financial constraint which was imposed by central government to curb local authority spending. This, in turn, frequently resulted in a real reduction in the rate support grant which made up the total income of the further education colleges. And finally, there was the emergence of the private training provider.

Now the colleges find themselves competing with private providers for an increasing share of their income and are faced with problems of insecurity due to the short-term and taciturn nature of much of the funding which is available through sources other than the local authority. There are other changes, as for example those introduced under the Education Reform Bill of 1988, but these first three are the major changes considered in this research.

Colleges such as West Biscop have over the years built up relationships with local industry through which they provide off-the-job apprenticeship training. Today, the

Youth Training Scheme has all but replaced the Apprenticeship system for young people and many of the firms who still take on apprentices have excellent training schools on site.

In the mid 1970s some of the colleges accepted MSC funding to provide training for adults under the old TOPS programme. In retrospect many of those teachers at West Biscop who were involved in the early days regarded this programme as being well funded, well organised and providing good quality training. Those same courses were still being offered, with minor changes, under the Adult Training Strategy after 1983 when the government turned its attention more towards training for adults. However, a combination of a number of changes in government policy at national level led to the demise of some of these courses at West Biscop; and comments from individuals closely involved with these changes suggested that this was part of a general trend affecting most further education colleges. These changes in government policy were on three levels. First, the overall direction of policy aimed to place responsibility for training more firmly with industry, thereby making training more responsive to industry, but also reducing direct government involvement and consequently public expenditure in this area. Second, the policy of the Manpower Services Commission, as it was when these changes were introduced, was to advocate local provision for local need. Those courses at West Biscop which were lost catered for a national catchment area. Finally, there was the general trend exemplified by the new government sponsored training programme for adults, Employment Training, towards short term cheaper training with a higher throughput of trainees.

This suggested an intention by government to place responsibility for "quality" training and retraining more and more with employers, whilst public money was directed towards short-term training for the under twenty-fives and the long term unemployed.

The consequence of this for West Biscop was that the pool of money, which had previously funded the longer term so called "quality" training courses for adults, had dried up.

Further education colleges are a valuable resource based in the community. They are repositories of knowledge and expertise which need to be freed from the constraints of archaic structures within, and budget constraints imposed from without. Colleges are non-profit making organisations and their remit is to serve the whole community. However, as some of the more academic teaching is 'hived off' to the schools, and skills training is taken over by private training organisations and employers themselves, the colleges are in danger of being pushed to the margins.

THE FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF INDUSTRY

An earlier section suggested that industry's needs are more about attitude change than skill acquisition, although skill acquisition is still important. The evidence collected as part of this research suggests that attitude change is effected not through training alone, but through training as part of an overall package which includes changes in working conditions and is concerned with job security.

What employers require are workers fully-trained in the skills and attitudes which are best for their company. For those companies who do train, retraining for multi-skills is part of the drive towards greater flexibility. Employers have sought flexibility to increase

productivity, reduce labour costs and sometimes to meet fluctuating demand. For these employers a flexible employee is not just one who possesses the right combination of skills, but one who is also adaptable willing and able to work as and how the company requires.

There are clearly limits to what both further education and industry can provide in the way of retraining for adults. It is also clear that public policy direction is dependent upon immediate priorities. Whether the individual or profits should come first. Both industry and further education have expertise in training individuals to standards of competence. The difference is that for further education the broader educational and occupational needs of the individual are given priority whereas for industry the health of the enterprise is of paramount importance.

CONCLUSION

The health of the enterprise, the need to increase productivity and profitability has led employers to introduce flexibility agreements, to negotiate single union agreements and in some cases to limit or proscribe trade union representation on site. The drive to maintain profitability and improve efficiency must also involve increased control on the part of capital to counteract the uncertainty of the market, but this constraint carries with it problems for the labour capital relationship since the relationship sought by these 'flexible' firms is essentially a co-operative one.

The employer needs to harness the creative potential of the worker whilst maintaining control and achieves this through encouraging cooperation and commitment to the company. A cooperative, flexible attitude is what employers seek in their workforce, and quality circles, harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment and retraining all help to foster these attitudes. Attitudes which bind the employee to the company. Such attitudes cannot be developed through classroom instruction alone. They must be absorbed and internalised as part of the working experience.

However, this type of retraining is designed to serve the immediate needs of a particular company. It cannot serve the needs of industry as a whole or individual workers. Flexibility should be about transferability or mobility of skills too. A nationally coordinated and comprehensive training policy could go beyond that which currently exists, making links with education and developing a broader base upon which new skills and abilities could be built.

Chapter 2 was critical of the lack of government intervention in training, especially training and retraining for adults. This thesis argues for greater state intervention in the coordination and establishment of a comprehensive training programme for adults. Industry alone, because of its competitive nature and tendency towards short term profit-oriented planning, cannot provide the population with the training and retraining it requires. Each company is capable of serving its own needs and in concert with other companies the needs of industry, but not the needs of individuals too. Because the force which drives industry is profit, industry cannot serve the long term needs of individuals and communities. When business is bad labour is shed and training is cut back. When business is good the needs of the company are given priority to those of individual employees.

One of the problems is that, in the past, policy-makers have treated education and training as two separate entities which merit two separate policy approaches. National manpower policy to date has been characterised by an emphasis on voluntarism and a hesitancy about state intervention in training policy which has resulted in education and training programmes which appear to parallel each other and thus paralyse the development of a broader based comprehensive education and training package. Perhaps the solution is to develop a fully comprehensive system of education and training for adults as well as young people where there is provision for the type of enterprise specific training which industry requires, alongside an education process which inputs those general competencies which are transferable and will form the basis for further training. Training and retraining should enable the adult to maintain him or herself in employment which is interesting and fulfilling and within the capabilities of the individual. It should also contain within it strong links with a broad based education that would enable the individual to recognise and develop their personal qualities and which can be used as a base for further education and training in the future.

Such a programme would make full use of the facilities and expertise available within the further education colleges and co-ordinate this more formally with what is already available in industry.

NOTES

¹ See also a paper given by Anna Pollert, at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference in 1987 entitled "Flexible' Patterns of Work and Ideology: the new Right, Industrialism and Dualist Analysis". (Anna Pollert, "Flexible' Patterns of Work and Ideology: the New Right, Post Industrialism and Dualist Analysis" Paper presented to British Sociological Association Annual Conference 6-9 April 1987.)

² For very recent examples see the following studies:

W. W. Daniel, Workplace Industrial Relations and Technical Change, (London: Francis Pinter, 1987)

Michael Cross, "Changes in Working Practices in UK Manufacturing 1981-88", Industrial Relations Review and Report, 415, (May, 1988), 2-10.

See also the work of Bryn Jones and Michael Rose, who look at changes in the organisation of work and conclude from their research that there is no evidence of widespread deskilling in larger manufacturing companies and changes in working practices generally were "neither clear cut nor uniform". (Jones and Rose, p. 35) They also conclude that cases involving the total derecognition of trade unions on site are rare. (Bryn Jones and Michael Rose, "Re-dividing Labour: Factory Politics and Work Reorganisation in the current Industrial Transition", in The Changing Experience of Employment, Restructuring and Recession, ed. K. Purcell, (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with British Sociological Association, 1986), pp. 35-57.)

³ The Electricians Union the EETPU were one of the first unions to involve themselves in single union deals and in the early days were responsible for signing most of the agreements. Since then other trade unions for example GMBATU and the TGWU have become heavily involved in such agreements. In September 1988 the EETPU was expelled from the TUC partly because of its refusal to abandon its single-union deal with Orion Electric and partly because of its actions in flouting the Bridlington Rules.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

**RETRAINING ADULTS:
AN EXAMINATION OF NATIONAL TRAINING POLICY,
ITS INFLUENCE ON THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF
ADULT JOB RETRAINING IN FURTHER EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY,
AND CONSEQUENT IMPACT ON THE EXPERIENCES AND
PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATING ADULTS**

**VOLUME 2 OF 2
APPENDICES**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

BY

PAULINE ADELE FOSTER

JANUARY 1990

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A P P E N D I X

N U M B E R O N E

M E T H O D O L O G Y

INTRODUCTION

In November 1983 the Manpower Services Commission published its report "Adult Training Strategy: Proposals for Action", which was followed in January 1984 by the government White Paper "Training for Jobs". For the first time attention was being refocused from youth training to adult retraining. However, it was unclear whether, in reality, the effect would be any different, since no more was to be invested in adult job retraining than had been absorbed under the old TOPS programme. This was nevertheless an indication that government believed the retraining of adults was an issue demanding attention and it was a portent of a general shift in the direction of government policy.

Because adult job retraining was now receiving more public and media attention, and because it was an area which was under researched, it seemed a subject ripe for

study. It was also an area where I could make use of my past experience and established contacts, especially in further education. I had worked as a teacher in further education for seven years, including one year at the college which I named West Biscop.

This appendix describes the way the research was organised, and conducted and is divided into two sections. The first section offers a factual account of the procedure by which I gained entry into organisations and conducted the research. The second section explores some of the problems and issues which informed the way the research was conducted. This latter half of the chapter is by no means intended to be an exhaustive account of the concerns which occupied me and influenced the research process. It is, instead, a selection of those issues which, I believe, reflect the unique character of the research and the particular circumstances under which the research was carried out.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This first section describes in outline the structure of the research, the techniques and methods employed in data collection, and the procedure by which data was analysed.

With regard to the collection of data, interviews and participant observation were used in the college. Interviews were the principal, and sometimes only, source of data in the companies. In addition, I used postal questionnaires on three separate occasions for gathering data which was not readily accessible through interview. These three surveys

are discussed at the end of this first section.

I chose to use semi- and unstructured interviews to collect the main body of data because I felt they were the most appropriate methods of gaining an understanding of people's attitudes and their perceptions of experiences of given situations. In the early stages of the research I had no clear notion of the major issues from the view of participants in the research process. The use of these particular interviewing techniques gave interviewees the opportunity to talk at length on matters which they felt were of greatest importance. As certain topics arose in conversation more frequently than others, I gained a clearer understanding of the major issues and encouraged interviewees to elaborate further.

The majority of interviews were done under formal arrangements and in private. I took notes throughout using shorthand, and was thus able to gain verbatim accounts of all interviews. Interviews of students and trainees lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and interviews of teaching staff, company management personnel and other individuals were between 45 minutes to one and a half hours in length.

During my time at the college I interviewed 29 students once and 19 students twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of their course. I also formally interviewed six members of the teaching staff plus the Principal and one administrator. With regard to the companies, I was able to interview thirteen members of management, most of whom were personnel managers or training officers, seven shop stewards, and nine trainees. These people were spread more or less evenly throughout the six companies. In addition to this I conducted six interviews with trade union officials, two at national level and four at local level. I also found a joint interview with two individuals who were

responsible for the establishment of a training consortium in the local area, particularly useful.

There were other interviews which were useful in enabling me to focus my research, but which did not in any direct way provide data. These included an interview with a tutor at a local agricultural college, a farmer directly involved in training farm workers, and individuals concerned with training in retailing and the National Health Service.

There was also plenty of opportunity for informal interviews in corridors, in car parks, in cars and in company lunchrooms and the college refectory. These were conducted casually and notes were made from memory as soon as possible afterwards.

Observation, in the strict methodological sense of the word, was carried out only at West Biscope, although it could be argued that the researcher switches to the observation mode whenever she enters the field. I was given permission by tutors to sit in classrooms while lessons were in progress and, whenever possible, I joined in classroom activities. I made a point of sitting with the class rather than apart from the group, which assisted me in understanding classroom activity from the students' viewpoint. I deliberately chose a seat in the centre of the group and always returned to that same seat each lesson in the hope that my presence would thereby be less obtrusive. It is doubtful, however, whether I achieved this end, since a single female in a group of 15 to 20 males is almost guaranteed to draw attention to herself. Nevertheless, by this method I was also able to get to know the students better, especially those sitting closer to me.

DATA COLLECTION IN THE COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION¹

Constraints on time and resources influenced my decision to conduct an in depth study of only one college of further education. Also, because the college principal was prepared to allow me to spend considerable time in the college and because of my previous knowledge of the institution, an in depth study seemed most appropriate. It is doubtful whether another institution, where I was unknown, would have been so liberal, or its staff so accommodating.

I was aware of the possibility that specific findings from this single study might not apply to other F.E. colleges. However, my own experience of working in another college, and information gained from literature written specifically for those working in the further education system, suggests broad similarities in the problems and issues faced by all colleges. This is especially so for those who have chosen to organise and run government sponsored courses. Therefore, it is hoped that the general conclusions will throw some light on the current dilemmas facing further education in general.

I began my research at the college by making contact with the Principal through a close friend who was employed as a member of the college management team and had frequent contact with the Principal. The Principal granted me an interview where I explained the objective of the research, the type of research I wished to carry out, and gave my assurances regarding anonymity. After some deliberation he offered me the opportunity to interview staff and students and observe classroom interaction in the case of five courses, all of them in the Engineering Faculty. Four courses were in the Building Department, and these were the Building Site Managers' Course, the Small Building Business Course, the Estimator/Surveyors' Course and the Wood Trades

Course. The fifth course was in the Electrical Engineering Department, and was referred to by staff and students at the Systems Engineering course, although its full title was National Technology Certificate in Electronic Engineering.

There was a further course, also in the Electrical Engineering Department, which the Principal felt I would be interested in studying. The course was specifically designed for young women who were interested in taking up technician level posts in engineering. This course, which had been successfully run as a pilot by the college in the previous year, was funded by the Manpower Services Commission, and validated by the Engineering Industry Training Board (EITB). For the current year, the course was still being closely monitored by the EITB, so the Principal gave his permission on the understanding that I also obtained permission from the EITB to conduct my research. I interviewed the course tutor at some length and wrote to the EITB requesting permission to interview the students and carry out some classroom observation. Their reply asked me to delay my research and approach them at a later date when they would be able to help me. This I did, but my second letter received a negative response. By this time I was collecting sufficient material from the other courses, so I made a decision to abandon this course on the basis that the EITB were unlikely to be cooperative, and the course was more about training than retraining. In addition, the characteristics of this course and its students made it quite unique and therefore more suitable for a separate study altogether which would look specifically at women and training.

Although the other courses were open to men and women, all the students were male, aged between 20 and 55 years, with the majority being between 25 and 35. The whole age range was more or less covered on all of the courses, although the

Estimator/Surveyors' and Systems Engineering courses tended to attract younger students.

In all cases the course tutor was interviewed at length, and where possible, several of the staff who taught on the courses were interviewed informally. In all six members of the teaching staff were interviewed. Most of the students were interviewed, and some were interviewed twice. Not all of the students were asked to participate in a second interview, but those who did were interviewed once at the commencement of the course and again as the course drew to a close to ascertain whether their views had changed as a result of undergoing retraining. Some students preferred not to participate in the research and their wishes were respected. Out of a possible total of 56 students, 48 were interviewed.

Of the college management only the Principal and a member of staff closely involved with Manpower Services sponsored courses were interviewed formally and at length. However, there were frequent casual encounters with department heads, the Dean of the Engineering Faculty, the Vice Principal, and secretarial staff, as well as other staff less directly involved in the research. I was also at liberty to talk to representatives from the local Manpower Services Office whenever they visited the college, although no formal interviews were arranged.

Before the commencement of all courses, with the exception of the Wood Trades Course, I sat in on selection interviews. This enabled me to assess procedures by which students were selected for courses, and engage in some initial, casual and exploratory interviews with teaching and MSC staff.

In addition to interviews, I engaged in classroom observation in the case of 4 of the courses and participated in classroom activities where appropriate. I got to know students on two of the courses particularly well and as a consequence students and staff on these courses invited me to evening events which they organised towards the end of their course, including a formal dinner where wives and girlfriends were invited, and competition darts and pool evenings where I proved myself miserably incompetent at both games.

DATA COLLECTION IN THE COMPANIES

In order to provide the research with another focus, and because of the practical problems involved in long distance travel, I chose to confine the study to a defined geographical area. Although the college had a national catchment area for some of its courses, the vast majority of its students travelled from within the boundaries of this geographical area. All but one of the companies was situated in the extreme south of the area. The area boundaries extended over the southern half of a rural county and the heavily industrialised northern section of the neighbouring county to the south. Thus the area contained an interesting mixture of rural and urban, agricultural and industrial features.

Aware that making entry into industry would be a problem, I began by taking advantage of a contact I had established in a previous research job. This individual directed me to another person working in the management department of a neighbouring college who worked closely with personnel officers in local industry. With this person's permission, I used his name to request entry into several local companies. Eighteen

organisations were approached and five granted me an interview. In the first instance interviews were requested with either a personnel manager or training officer, and I was offered and accepted interviews with four personnel managers, three training officers, a chief chemist and an engineering manager. After this first round of interviews I wrote again to four of the companies whose training programmes seemed worthy of further study, suggesting that a broader understanding of their training programme might be gained through interviews with a trade union representative. All four offered me the opportunity to interview shop stewards. Three of these four companies proved to be the most interesting and these are the three covered in Chapter 7. For the third round I chose the two companies who were introducing the most far reaching changes and requested permission to interview trainees. The request was granted.

The value of this last round of interviews was, however, limited. In the case of the first company, they carefully selected two candidates who had benefited from a reorganisation at the plant and were clearly grateful for the opportunity to retrain. I learned from other sources that many of the employees were unhappy with the state of affairs as they existed, but I did not gain access to these people through the company. At the second company I was taken on a tour of the plant and invited to talk to whoever I wished. I took advantage of this even though the interviews were always in the presence of a member of middle management. In addition, because of the circumstances under which the interviews took place, they were necessarily short and informal. Nevertheless I was able to gain a general feeling of the wide variety of attitudes that workers had towards the changes which were taking place within the company.

As stated earlier, all these companies were situated in the southern industrial section of the area covered by the research. I later made contact through an intermediary at

the college with a large high tech engineering company situated in the same city as the college, but because of their involvement in negotiations with the workforce I was offered only the opportunity to interview two of their training personnel.

Originally the research was intended to cover agriculture and the service sector as well as education and industry, but this plan was abandoned for two reasons. The first is that the weight of data was becoming unwieldy and too wide ranging. The second was that from the few preliminary interviews which were carried out, it was clear that there was little retraining going on in these sectors within the geographical area covered by the research. Nor could the data be used to make direct comparisons or enhance the material already collected. Both these areas are, nonetheless, worthy of research, but as separate projects.

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW AND DOCUMENTARY DATA

At the end of the data collection period the material which had been amassed consisted of verbatim typed transcripts of interviews, less detailed transcripts of casual interviews, notes on observation sessions, prospectuses and course literature, company public relations material, newspaper cuttings and some printed material that provided further data on the companies.

After planning the overall structure of the thesis and broad content of each chapter, all the data was examined and relevant sections were extracted and organised under chapter headings using a word processor. The material within each chapter was then reorganised before writing took place. The aim was to allow the data to broadly

structure the thesis and to this end special attention was paid to the use of quotations from interviews, which formed the skeleton of most chapters. Each chapter was written as a separate essay, although designed to fit in with the theme of the whole thesis. This was achieved by combining data with analysis in each chapter.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Three surveys were conducted to collect data which could not easily be elicited through the qualitative methods described earlier. Self-completion postal questionnaires were used for this purpose. The first was carried out during the early months of the research and was a survey of former students of three of the courses studied at West Biscop College (see Appendix 6, Items 1 and 2). All of these courses were in the Building Department. They were the Building Site Manager's Course, the Small Building Business Course and the Estimator/Surveyors Course. The primary aim was to discover how far the career experiences of the students were in line with the objectives of the courses they had completed. In addition, I took the opportunity to collect data on retrospective views regarding course content, the quality of the course, and the experience of being a mature student in a college of further education.

191 questionnaires were despatched and 97 were returned completed. This represents a 50.8 per cent response rate. In addition, 10 questionnaires were returned 'gone away' which left 85 outstanding. This was better than expected given that many of these former students had moved to find employment subsequent to finishing their course. Some were abroad and others travelled as part of their work. To ensure the best possible response the questionnaires were accompanied by an informal letter,

typed on college headed notepaper, and signed by the appropriate course tutor (see Appendix 6, Item 3). Some of the students replied direct to the course tutor enclosing a short personal note with the questionnaire.

The questionnaires and the accompanying letters were marked 'Strictly Confidential' and the confidentiality of the information was stressed in the letter. In addition, in order to encourage a good response rate, a stamped addressed envelope was included. As a further inducement, respondents were offered a copy of the completed report plus, if they desired, their addresses would be passed on to former course colleagues whom they were asked to specify.

The questionnaires were despatched in batches over a period of 10 days between 26th May 1986 and 5th June 1986. As questionnaires were received by the college, they were date-stamped by the Departmental Secretary. As the number of questionnaires being received each day gradually dwindled a further copy of the questionnaire was despatched to those who had failed to reply. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter referring to the original letter and questionnaire, and urging completion and return as soon as possible (see Appendix 6, Item 4). The final questionnaire was received at the college and date stamped 14th October, 1986.

A further two, much smaller surveys were carried out towards the end of the research. The first consisted of a follow-up questionnaire, identical except for a few amendments, to the one detailed above, and was sent to all students who had been interviewed as part of the research (see Appendix 6, Items 5, 6, and 7). The questionnaires were intended to reach students between one and three months after completion of the course, and by which time most of them were expected to have found employment. Reminder letters were sent approximately one month later (see Appendix 6, Item 8).

Forty-eight letters with questionnaires and stamped addressed envelopes were despatched and twenty-nine were returned. This represents a 60 per cent response rate.

Finally, a one and a half page questionnaire was sent to local companies (see Appendix 6, Items 9, 10 and 11). The questionnaire was designed to elicit some general information about the size and type of company and its involvement in retraining for adult workers. In all, eight companies were contacted by letter and questionnaire, and five companies responded by completing and returning the questionnaire. The information obtained was added to similar information which had been collected from the four chemical and two engineering companies who were studied in greater depth.

All the companies contacted by letter had already been approached to take part in the research in 1986, and had written to say that for various reasons they were unable to co-operate, but nonetheless expressed an interest in the research. I capitalised on this initial contact referring to their reply to my enquiry and requested their help once more.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

The questionnaire was designed in such a way as to enable the respondent to complete it within 10 to 15 minutes, but care was taken to provide extra space for those respondents who wished to include more detailed information. To facilitate easy completion and analysis, only one totally open-ended question was included. All other questions offered a number of possible alternative answers and asked the respondent to tick the appropriate box or boxes.

The survey with the large sample was coded and analysed using the SPSSx computer program and a 36 page report was compiled and submitted to the college for comment. In the light of these comments, the report was amended and shortened and included as Appendix 2 of this thesis.

The two other surveys, both with a much smaller sample frame, were coded and analysed without the benefit of the computer and the results are summarised in Appendices 3 and 4.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

A multitude of issues and problems arose during the course of the research, and I propose here to explore in outline just some of those which had the greatest impact on the research. Most of these concerns relate to the research carried out West Biscop College. This is partly because a wide range of methods was used for research at the college and more hours were spent in this institution than in any of the companies, where only interviews and some limited observation was allowed.

PERSONAL PRIVACY AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the writing of the thesis, pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of individuals and of organisations. When it has been necessary to describe

companies or the college the facts have been presented in such a way as to give as accurate as possible an account of each organisation while some details, like for example, geographical location, have been distorted to protect anonymity.

From time to time interviewees made statements which they pointed out were "off-the-record". These were not noted, but nor were they erased from memory. However, care has been taken not to refer to any such statements in the thesis. In addition some data was obtained from sources which, if revealed, might prejudice the research from the point of view of others who were interviewed, or may destroy anonymity. In this case the identity of such sources is not revealed.

Whenever I conducted interviews with students in particular I insisted that it be done in private and made clear to the interviewee that whatever was said at interview would be treated with the strictest confidence. I also pointed out that the interviewee was at liberty to decline to answer any question I asked. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview all of the trainees in private.

At West Biscop I sometimes spent four or five hours a day with a particular group of students, sometimes over a full week, to return perhaps a week or two later to complete another phase of the research. Inevitably I got to know some of the students very well, and I suppose they got to know me. The same applies to the teaching staff, although I already knew many of them by reputation prior to the first meeting. Being within a group, yet not of the group gives a person special status. In such a position the researcher gains privileged information, yet it is known that she is unlikely to use that information to gain personal advantage within the group. The art of researching a closed group is to maintain a non-threatening posture. For this reason individuals are

more likely to reveal information they might normally conceal from other members of the group.

Perhaps for this reason, individuals took the opportunity of the private interview to unburden themselves of some personal problems. Students were forced to live away from home for most of the week and marriages, which were already struggling to survive, were put under further pressure. On two occasions I listened to men as they described problems with their marriages and I battled with the issue of how to separate what they were telling me about their personal relationships from what this indicated about the difficulties of being a mature student on a retraining course. Detail about their marriages was not research data, and I was concerned to respect their right to privacy, but the strain of living away from home was my concern as a researcher.

Protecting information and protecting sources is part and parcel of the research process. The researcher can unwittingly become embroiled in intrigues which almost amount to character assassination. The confidential nature of this next occurrence prevents me from going into too much detail, but a broad outline will serve to explain the dilemma.

At least three separate parties spoke at length to me about an issue which had arisen with regard to an incident concerning a student. In speaking to me each party criticised at least one other party and asked me to treat what had passed between us as confidential. My problem was responding in the appropriate manner when individuals passed on to me information which was already known to me, but which they thought was new. A further problem was listening to criticism of those other individuals who had confided in me, showing empathy with the teller's viewpoint, and yet maintaining a position of neutrality. This incident was indeed a "storm in a teacup",

and it was convenient and easy for individuals to express to me long harboured and seldom expressed feelings of aggression and resentment. My concern was that my actions, which were intended to cause as little impact upon the situation as possible, could be construed as being duplicitous.

GAINING AND RETAINING COOPERATION

An interviewee imparts information in the belief that it will be used for a worthy purpose, that the gift will not be abused, and part of that process is maintaining confidentiality and protecting privacy. However, maintaining that privacy also demands cooperation from other parties.

During the early stages of my research I attended a set of interviews for applicants for a course, and I was given permission to interview successful applicants once they had been offered a place on the course. Once the interviews drew to a close it was approaching late afternoon and applicants and teaching staff were anxious to leave the college and begin, in some cases, lengthy journeys home. For that reason I sacrificed the possibility of more detailed data for expediency and conducted two group interviews. I located a suitable room and settled down with the successful applicants. After explaining that confidentiality would be respected and that anything said to me would not be passed on to any member of the teaching staff or the Manpower Services Commission, I noticed several of the applicants looking distractedly across the room. I turned to see the course tutor, who had assisted in the selection interviews, standing by the open door. I pointed out to him that the group interview was intended to be private and he left. The interview was brief and I later sat down in the same room to

talk with a second group. Once again the same course tutor was noticed standing by the open door intent on listening. Somewhat embarrassed, I had to give the same explanation and he left, but reluctantly. It seemed the incident demanded a tactful approach on my part. Later, in casual conversation with the tutor, I broached the subject and he explained that he merely wanted to find out as much as he could about the people he would soon be teaching. Fortunately I had a good relationship with this teacher. He was extremely conscientious, so I understood this statement. However, the fact that he persisted after the first request to leave, indicates that, for him, his own priorities came first. More importantly, however, it leads me to question interpretations of privacy that teachers apply to students' affairs.

In all other respects this tutor was very cooperative and gave me every assistance. When I began the research at the college this was true of all the staff with whom I came into contact. As I entered the all male staffrooms chairs were hastily pushed back from desks as tutors rose to offer me a seat. They would also talk at length about their work and the students. However, as I became a more familiar figure around that part of the college my presence began to be taken for granted and was sometimes ignored. Around this time the impending college reorganisation was announced and, simultaneously news of the withdrawal of funding from several courses in the Building Department was made known. The teaching staff were under extreme pressure and most of their attention and energy was directed towards protecting their own jobs which were under threat. I supposed at that time my presence had a high nuisance rating and I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. In addition anyone walking around with a notebook asking questions is likely to increase feelings of insecurity, so I contented myself with casual conversations in corridors or in the car park in order to gain a feel for the atmosphere in the college.

It was around this time that the logistics of doing research became more difficult, although never impossible. For instance, no one ever offered to provide me with a room to interview students in private. I was forced to wander the college corridors and find one myself. Occasionally interviews were conducted in what felt like sub-zero temperatures, especially on a Monday morning when the college heating system had not quite recovered from the weekend shut down.

Most staff were conscientious about explaining the purpose of my research to students. However, on one occasion I arrived to confront a class of students who had no inkling of who I was or why I was there. They had gathered in a classroom for unsupervised project work and the tutor had said I could use that extended period for interviews, but had failed to inform the students. On other occasions course tutors had failed to request permission from other tutors who were teaching on their course, for me to observe during lessons. After the first embarrassing incident I made a point of introducing myself to each new tutor I encountered with a full explanation of my presence in the classroom. This I considered a courtesy which should be extended to any teacher. However it also involved me in renegotiating access on a regular basis. In contrast, another course tutor organised my observation periods very efficiently, but in the process limited my access to a small number of classes, excluding his own.

A similar situation occurred with the companies in which I researched. Every interview needed the permission of management and they were at liberty to censor my access, which they did to varying degrees. Management selected the trainees whom I interviewed and one training manager suggested he might like to sit in on the interviews. He was, however, amenable to my arguments against this practice.

ROLES AND RESEARCHING

The ambiguity of the role which I saw myself playing caused me some concern yet probably enabled me to collect wider and richer data than would have otherwise been possible. This dilemma presented itself in a number of ways when researching in both the college and in the companies.

I was not a stranger to West Biscop. I had held a part-time teaching post at the college for the previous 12 months, and through a close friend I was already acquainted with many of the teaching staff whom I would not have normally met in my position as part-time lecturer in Sociology. I had a working knowledge of the main college building, although I had carried out all of my teaching in a large annexe just five minutes walk from the main building. So I was familiar with the college and some of its staff, yet I was a stranger to the institution in my role as researcher and, as such, was a guest in the staffrooms and classrooms where I researched. The situation demanded that I asked permission to research in those places and did not abuse that permission. I spent many hours in the college, yet had no base, not even six square foot in the corner of a staffroom (the usual allotment for FE teachers), which I could call my own.

I felt my role was ambiguous. Yet its ambiguity was its strength. I could ask naive questions that were designed to elicit information which people would not divulge in ordinary conversation, and individuals would confide in me as a relative stranger. At the same time my previous knowledge of the college and its various personalities enabled me to make better sense of the information which was offered.

There was an added dimension to this issue and this was the fact that I was a woman researching in a virtually all male environment. All the teaching staff and students were male as were management and trainees. Only one female shop steward was interviewed. Again this role carried with it advantages and disadvantages. As a woman I could appear non-threatening to the men I was interviewing, and although my views on feminism were made clear to individuals in more private conversations, I deliberately declined to pursue the topic in any aggressive sense if I even suspected it might arouse opposition. "Pulling my leg" about such matters was a popular pastime with some of the students and I went along with the game so long as it remained inoffensive. As a consequence, I believe I was able to elicit certain types of information more easily than would the male researcher.

Whilst I was aware that being a female researcher conferred on me particular advantages, at the same time there were constant reminders of certain traditional views and misconceptions that some individuals hold regarding women's occupational roles.

This was brought home to me on the occasion when I observed at a formal meeting held at the college which was chaired by the Vice Principal. Before the commencement of the meeting I was introduced to the Vice Principal as a researcher from Warwick University and throughout the meeting I took notes of the proceedings. Then, as the meeting drew to a close, he proceeded to issue me with instructions as to how the minutes should be typed and distributed as if I were his secretary!

I was also plagued by a nagging feeling that certain parties did not take me or my research seriously enough. This had a particular effect on my behaviour. On the one hand I found myself striving to be accommodating and agreeable in order to encourage interviewees to talk freely and confidently, while on the other hand I felt the need to ask questions in such a way as to demonstrate that I had opinions and understood

particular issues. Thus I could hopefully add legitimacy to the research. This was of particular concern to me when I interviewed members of management. However, I probably veered too far in the wrong direction on one particular occasion because a Personnel Manager was prompted to remark to a shop steward, who later related this to me, that I was possibly "a little 'pink' around the edges".

CONCLUSION

This account of the research process could easily extend beyond the limitations of a single chapter or appendix. In keeping this account brief I have, therefore, excluded many of the details which would add colour and realism to both the descriptive account of the data collection and analysis and the final section which examines some of my concerns as a researcher. However, in order to present the most accurate account possible, I have endeavoured to select material which, I believe, best illustrates the unique nature of this particular research project.

N O T E S

¹ At the time of the research West Biscop was undergoing reorganisation which followed a merger with another smaller college of further education. Certain methodological issues and problems which arose as a consequence of the process of change which the college was undergoing are discussed in the following publication:

Pauline Foster, "Change and Adjustment in a Further Education College", in The Ethics of Educational Research, ed. Robert G. Burgess (London: Falmer Press, 1989), pp. 188-204.

A P P E N D I X
N U M B E R T W O
W E S T B I S C O P C O L L E G E
A S U R V E Y O F P A S T S T U D E N T S

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The following are the results of a postal survey (see Appendix 6, items 1 to 4) carried out amongst past students of West Biscop College in the summer of 1986. The survey covered the following courses all of which were in the Building and Civil Engineering Department:

Building Site Managers' Course

Estimator Surveyors' Course

Small Building Business Course.

For the Building Site Managers' Course and the Estimator Surveyors' Course ex-students from the 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 intakes were contacted. The

Department also ran two Small Building Business Courses per year, commencing January and April. The survey covered all intakes between January 1982 and April 1985.

The response rate for each course was as follows:

TABLE NO. 1
RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE LISTED ACCORDING TO COURSE

Course	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Building Site Managers	36	37.1
Estimator/Surveyors	17	17.5
Small Building Business	44	45.4

It should be noted that the results contained in this report are based solely on information taken from the completed and returned questionnaires. The percentage calculations shown are based on the number of individuals who responded, not the total number of individuals who attended the courses. It should also be noted that a 100 per cent response rate may have revealed patterns at variance with those shown below.

This report is a truncated version of the original report which was submitted to West Biscop College, and the data collected in response to several of the questions on the postal questionnaire have not been included. This has been done to keep the report concise and relevant to the main themes of the research.

GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

The first question respondents were asked was whether the address to which the questionnaire was despatched was correct, if not they were invited to give their new address. Except for a small minority, the addresses used were those on file at the end of the course. The data showed that 68 per cent of the respondents had not changed their address at all, whereas 29.9 per cent had moved to another address within the United Kingdom since completing the course. One respondent (1 per cent), gave an address in Europe and another (1 per cent), had moved to an address in the Far East.

Looked at course by course, the data showed that one Site Manager moved to the Far East (Hong Kong) and one of the graduates of the Small Building Business Course posted his completed questionnaire in France. He had been self-employed for three years since finishing the course, but was currently "travelling the world". When home in England he was self-employed, but did not appear to run his own business. In addition 5 (13.9 per cent) Site Managers; 8 (47.1 per cent) Estimators and 16 (36 per cent) Small Builders moved to another address within the United Kingdom since completing the course.

This data may be inaccurate for two reasons. Firstly it is possible that those who failed to return their questionnaires did so because they had moved to another location and thus the questionnaire did not reach them. Second it is fairly common for building workers to work away from home, returning to their permanent address only at weekends, thus no change of address would be apparent.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

Respondents were asked about the nature of their present employment. Only 9.3 per cent reported themselves to be unemployed, although it should be remembered that those less likely to return the questionnaire would be those who have done less well since leaving the course.

The largest category were those who regarded themselves as self-employed (38 people) (39.2 per cent). Of these, 4 had completed the Building Site Manager's Course, and 34 the Small Building Business Course. It would, therefore, have been expected that 34 of the 38 (i.e. those completing the Small Business Course) would move into self-employment anyway as a result of completing their courses at West Biscop College. (See also section on the Small Business Addendum to the questionnaire)

The next most frequently cited occupation was that of surveyor (6) (6.2 per cent); 3 of whom had completed the Estimator/Surveyor Course. Four (4.1 per cent) of the respondents were working as site managers, all of whom had completed the Site Managers' Course. Another 4 (4.1 per cent) of respondents were building inspectors or officers; 4 (4.1 per cent) were site agents; and 4 (4.1 per cent) were working as estimators. These latter 4 having completed the Estimator/Surveyor Course.

Current employment analysed in terms of course and year reveals the following data:

TABLE NO. 2
CURRENT EMPLOYMENT LISTED ACCORDING TO COURSE AND DATE OF COURSE
COMMENCEMENT

Building Site Managers' Course		Number of Respondents
1981/1982:	Unemployed	1
	Foreman	1
	Site Manager	2
	Surveyor	1
	Self-employed	1
1982/83:	Site Agent	3
	Assistant Scheme Manager	1
1983/84:	Unemployed	1
	Site Manager	1
	Building Inspector/Officer	1
	Surveyor	1
	Site Agent	1
	Teacher/Instructor	1
	Self-employed	1
1984/85:	Unemployed	2
	Foreman	1
	Commissioning Engineer	1
	Self-employed	2
	Acting Project Manager	1
<u>Estimator/Surveyors' Course</u>		
1981/82:	Building Inspector/Officer	1
	Local Government Officer	1
	Voluntary Worker	1
1982/83:	Building Inspector/Officer	1
	Estimator	2
	Surveyor	2
	Other	2
1983/84:	Contracts Manager	1
	Building Inspector/Officer	1
	Joiner	1
1984/85:	Technician	1
	Estimator	2
	Surveyor	1

Small Building Business Course

January 1982:	Teacher/Instructor	1
	Self-employed	3
	Project Manager/Trainer	1
April 1982:	Unemployed	1
	Surveyor	1
	Self-employed	5
January 1983:	Self-employed	7
	Teacher Instructor	1
April 1983:	Unemployed	2
	Self-employed	2
January 1984:	Self-employed	5
April 1984:	Unemployed	2
	Self-employed	3
January 1985:	Self-employed	3
	Joiner	1
April 1985:	Self-employed	6

Of those in employment, 52.6 per cent were in the building industry, 9.3 per cent were working with local authorities and 4.1 per cent were working in civil engineering.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit whether completion of the course at West Biscop was instrumental in enabling the respondent to secure his present job. Surprisingly, 40.2 per cent felt they would have been able to secure their present position without having completed the course at West Biscop. However, this figure is skewed somewhat by the large numbers of those on the Small Building Business Course who answered 'Yes' to this question.

48.5 per cent of total respondents felt the course helped them directly in securing their present employment and 11.3 per cent failed to answer this question.

This information is summarised in table form below:

TABLE NO. 3
IMPACT OF THE COURSE ON SECURING CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

Course	Would you have been able to secure your present employment without having completed the course at West Biscop College?			
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>%</u>
Building Site Managers	8	22.2	23	63.9
Estimator/Surveyors	3	17.6	13	76.5
Small Building Business	28	63.6	11	25

FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING

Respondents were asked whether they had taken any training or education courses since leaving West Biscop College. 18.6 per cent said yes they had, whereas 70.1 per cent said they had not. 11.3 per cent failed to answer the question. The most frequently mentioned courses were Chartered Institute of Builders Membership Courses (3.1 per cent) and Higher Technology Certificates (3.1 per cent). However, a variety of other courses were also mentioned including Direct Entry to the Chartered Institute of Builders, Certificate of Education, Chartered Surveyors Examination Part I, adult vocational guidance, Institute of Housing qualifications, Institute of Clerk of Works examinations, English language, law and economics. These were taken by one respondent in each case. Some respondents also took short courses covering site levelling, management theory, public relations and timber infestation.

When looked at course by course, 5 (13.9 per cent) Building Site Managers had done further education or training since completing their course at West Biscop College. The figure for the Estimator/Surveyor Course was 7 (41.2 per cent); for the Small Building Business Course 6 (13.6 per cent).

Although the numbers actually taking courses was low, those who professed an interest in further education or training was higher, that is, 56.7 per cent, with 17.5 per cent supplying a negative answer. 25.8 per cent did not answer this question. Those completing the Small Building Business course professed greatest interest in further education or retraining with 31 (70.5 per cent) saying 'yes'. Next in terms of enthusiasm to take on further training were the Estimator/Surveyors with 8 (47 per cent) answering 'yes' and 3 (17.6 per cent) answering 'no'. Finally, for the Building Site Managers' Course, 16 (44.4 per cent) answered 'yes' and 5 (13.9 per cent) answered 'no'.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING TO RETRAIN

Respondents were presented with five alternatives why they might have chosen to retrain. They were also provided with space to add any other reasons they felt applied to themselves. The given alternatives were as follows:

- (a) It was an opportunity to get back into employment.
- (b) You saw it as an opportunity to advance in your chosen career.
- (c) You felt it would offer the chance to change your career.

- (d) It filled in time between jobs.
- (e) Because of changes in your personal life.

Respondents were asked to tick as many alternatives as they felt appropriate and they opted predominantly for alternatives (a) to (c). Many more alternatives were added by respondents themselves, although they tended to apply in the case of only one or two individuals. Some of these were as follows:

- (f) Hoped the course would offer an 'introduction to computers.
- (g) Course seemed to offer basis for more direct control over large part of one's personal life and greater security than sub-contracting work.
- (h) Contracted industrial skin disorder in previous employment.
- (i) Opportunity to learn the correct methods of doing things.
- (j) Opportunity to change from itinerant work 'on the tools'.
- (k) Opportunity to regain confidence.

When asked why they chose the particular course they did, the respondents overwhelmingly saw the course as an opportunity to advance in their chosen career (87 per cent). The next most frequently mentioned option was that it offered an opportunity to change career (32 per cent). 19.6 per cent saw the course as an opportunity to get back into employment and 10.3 per cent chose to embark on the course because of changes in their personal life. The most frequently expressed combination of reasons was that embarking on a course was an opportunity for career advancement together with an opportunity to make a career change. (16.5 per cent)

Respondents were also asked why they chose West Biscop College and they were given several options and asked to tick the option which most closely approximated their own reason for choosing the college. These options were as follows:

- (a) You had heard that the college had a good reputation.
- (b) The college just happened to offer the course in which you were interested.
- (c) The college was within easy travelling distance of your home.
- (d) You were given the opportunity thereby of living away from home for a short while.

As with the previous question, respondents were asked to specify any other alternatives, and the following was added:

- (e) The college was pleasantly located geographically.

The vast majority, that is 95 (97.7 per cent), said that they chose West Biscop College because it offered the course in which they were interested, whereas 12 (12.4 per cent) said they were attracted by the college's reputation. Eleven (11.3 per cent) were attracted by the opportunity to live away from home for a short time, and 7 (7.2 per cent) chose the college because it was within easy travelling distance of their home. Finally, 2 (2.1 per cent) chose West Biscop because it was pleasantly located.

PROBLEMS

Because all the courses recruited nationally, the majority of students lived some of the time away from home. The survey showed that, of all the respondents, only one person (1 per cent) was able to live at home for the duration of the course, whereas 60 (61.9 per cent) lived away from home during the week and were able to return home each weekend. Fifteen (15.5 per cent) either chose not to, or found it difficult to, return home at weekends. A surprisingly large percentage, 20.6 per cent (20) did not return home during the course. One respondent failed to answer this question.

Of the problems that students encountered, the most common difficulties were financial, cited by 50 (51.5 per cent) of respondents. It is, however, difficult to attribute this to living away from home, since the students experienced a change in income level irrespective of whether or not they lived in rented accommodation for the duration of the course. Thirty-four (35.1 per cent) of the respondents said that living away from home presented them with travelling problems and 26 (26.8 per cent) experienced problems with domestic arrangements.

Money, or lack of it, did indeed present difficulties. Thirty-seven (38.1 per cent) of the students felt that they had made large financial sacrifices in order to retrain. Forty-one (42.3 per cent) felt the financial sacrifices were relatively small and 19 (19.6 per cent) believed they had made no financial sacrifices at all. Obviously the degree to which a financial sacrifice is deemed to be great or small depends very much on the life style and financial commitments of the individual, his income prior to commencing retraining, and whether or not he made financial provision to cover any anticipated reduction in income during the retraining. Answers to all of these conditions were, however, outside

the scope of the questionnaire.

In many cases the students on these courses had been out of education for some years. For some the gap may have been as great as thirty years and in such circumstances problems in adapting to a learning situation could occur. The questionnaire sought to discover the extent to which the students themselves felt they experienced difficulties. There were four alternatives offered and these were as follows:

- (a) Not at all
- (b) For the first week or two
- (c) For about the first ten weeks
- (d) Throughout the whole of the course

No one confessed to having difficulties throughout the whole of the course, and broadly similar percentages of individuals for each course said they experienced no learning difficulties at all. The responses were, for Small Building Business Course 24 (54.5 per cent), for the Estimator/Surveyors' Course 9 (52.9 per cent), and for the Building Site Managers' Course 18 (50 per cent). Fairly high percentages admitted to learning difficulties during the first week or two. For the Building Site Managers' Course the figures was 17 (47.2 per cent), for the Estimator/Surveyors' Course it was 7 (41.2 per cent) and for the Small Building Business Course it was 18 (40.1 per cent). However, most problems were soon overcome, and by the end of the first 10 weeks, fewer people were having problems. This data is summarised in the table below:

TABLE NO. 4
STUDENTS WHO SUFFERED LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Course	Degree of learning difficulty					
	None at all		For first week or two		For about first ten weeks	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Building Site Managers	18	50	17	47.2	1	2.8
Estimator/ Surveyors	9	52.9	7	41.2	1	5.9
Small Building Business	24	54.5	18	40.9	1	2.3

THE COURSE

One of the objectives of the questionnaire was to elicit opinions from students about course content and it was felt that the most satisfactory way to arrive at this information in a form which was quantifiable was to ask the following questions of respondents:

- (a) whether they found any aspect of the course particularly difficult;
- (b) if they found any parts of the course especially easy;
- (c) could they offer any recommendations for improving the course;
- (d) what educational value they put on the contributions of students as opposed to tutors.

Forty-nine (50.5 per cent) found no aspect of the course too difficult and 70 (72.2 per cent) found nothing too easy. Fifty-one (49.5 per cent) of students did however find some of their course difficult and they referred to the following subjects in particular.

The centre column shows the number of respondents who found a particular subject difficult and the last column shows the percentage of respondents who found that subject difficult.

TABLE NO. 5
COURSE SUBJECTS WHICH RESPONDENTS FOUND DIFFICULT

Course	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Calculations, Maths or Bookkeeping	20	20.6
Surveying	9	9.3
Computing	5	5.2
Estimating	3	3.1
Economics	3	3.1
Contract Law	2	2.1

Four people (4.1 per cent) thought the volume of work they were expected to get through was too great and two people (2.1 per cent) experienced difficulty getting up in the morning. Six (6.2 per cent) of the respondents were critical of tutors. In two instances these were general criticisms, whereas other respondents referred to specific subject areas where they felt the teaching was inadequate or contributed to their learning difficulties.

Respondents said they found the following aspects of the course too easy.

TABLE NO. 6
COURSE SUBJECTS WHICH RESPONDENTS FOUND EASY

Course	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Surveying and levelling	8	8.2
Estimating	6	6.2
Management Studies	4	4.1
Computer Studies	4	4.1
Contract Law	3	3.1
Rudimentary Building Principles	3	3.1
Work Study	3	3.1
Technical Drawing	2	2.1

One respondent used this opportunity to criticise other students in the group whom he thought were slow learners.

When asked about the educational contribution of fellow students no one suggested that they learned more from their fellow students than from staff, although 74 (76.3 per cent) felt that contributions by other students were of value. In comparison only 19 (19.6 per cent) dismissed such contributions as of little educational value. Four (4.1 per cent) of the respondents declined to comment.

Finally, when asked to comment generally or make recommendations for improving the course the responses were numerous and varied. To summarise, the most typical single suggestions were either that the course or teaching methods were good (18)

(18.6 per cent) or that teaching methods could be improved (16) (16.5 per cent). Which seems to lead to no really firm conclusion.

Other frequently expressed suggestions were, that the course was too short (7) (7.2 per cent), that more time should be spent on computers (6) (6.2 per cent), on estimating (5) (5.2 per cent), on the financial aspects of running a business (5) (5.2 per cent), or that the course should be geared more closely to specialist trades and specialist needs of students (5) (5.2 per cent). A further 5 (5.2 per cent) felt it sufficiently significant to remark that the tutors had been very helpful during the duration of their course.

Just to prove that you cannot please all of the people all of the time time, one respondent felt there was too much free time in the evenings, whilst another felt the working day was too long. And, of the less serious comments, (or at least I assume so), one small building business graduate felt that the public houses in the city were too much of a distraction. Another felt that the Small Building Business Course students were fed too much and too well by the catering staff at the residential centre where the course was held.

Interesting though many of these comments may be, their real value cannot be recognised until the data is analysed according to course and year and cross comparisons made. However, the variety of responses was so broad as to make effective categorisation impossible.

SMALL BUILDING BUSINESS ADDENDUM

An addendum to the questionnaire was directed at those respondents who had completed the Small Building Business Course. The aim was to discover whether respondents were still in business and to ascertain some idea of how the businesses had developed by asking questions about the number of years the business had existed and the number of people it employed. The data is summarised in the following tables:

TABLE NO. 7
SMALL BUILDING BUSINESS
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO CURRENTLY OPERATE THEIR OWN BUSINESS

Course commencing	Business is still operating	Business is no longer operating
January 1982	3	2
April 1982	4	2
January 1983	5	1
April 1984	2	1
January 1984	5	0
April 1984	4	1
January 1985	3	1
April 1985	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTALS	32	8
(2 missing cases)	(72.7%)	(18.2%)

TABLE NO. 8
NUMBER OF BUSINESSES EMPLOYING WORKERS OTHER THAN THE PROPRIETOR

Course Commencing	Number of Employees				
	1	2-4	5-9	10-14	Over 14
January 1982	0	1	0	0	0
April 1982	0	2	0	0	0
January 1983	0	2	2	0	0
April 1983	1	1	0	0	0
January 1984	1	0	1	1	0
April 1984	0	0	1	0	0
January 1985	0	1	0	0	0
April 1985	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTALS	2	8	4	1	0

N.B.

It is not known whether the above were employed directly or on a sub-contract basis. Only four respondents made this distinction.

TABLE NO. 9
NUMBER OF YEARS BUSINESS HAVE BEEN OPERATING

One year or less	Up to two years	Up to three years	Up to four years	More than* four years
13	8	3	8	4

*The first group of students completed the course in the Spring of 1982, and the survey was conducted in the summer of 1986. It is therefore unlikely that any business would be older than five years.

CONCLUSIONS

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

One of the major difficulties with any survey is selecting a representative research sample, and the only truly representative sample must be a total sample. Ideally this report would have been based on a total sample, but inevitably those working in the construction industry and especially those seeking to further their career, tend to move around the country or the world. In addition, and again inevitably, some people choose not to respond to postal questionnaires for a variety of reasons. So, in a sense, the sample for this survey was self-selecting.

It is also certain that the characteristics of the individuals who responded differed from those individuals who did not take part in the survey in ways which significantly influenced the results. For example, those who tended to keep in touch with tutors, who felt they had done well in their careers subsequent to retraining, the more literate, and those who were less reticent in expressing opinions, would be more likely to respond to the questionnaire.

With regard to the layout and structure of the questionnaire, care was taken to ensure clarity of presentation and ease of completion and return. A personally addressed letter signed by the appropriate course tutor accompanied each questionnaire to ensure a good response rate.

Despite the care taken and the staging of a short pilot study, some anomalies in the questionnaire construction did come to light for the first time at the analysis stage.

Questions posed in a postal questionnaire must be simple and unambiguous. Consequently, the data collected can lack the detail and subtlety of data collected from face to face interviews. Unfortunately in this case, efforts to keep some questions simple and brief led to ambiguity. These issues should be born in mind when making use of the results.

Finally, with the best of intentions, respondents do not always tell the truth in questionnaires. Individual responses may provide grossly distorted views of reality, which, in themselves are interesting, although not suitable material from which to draw generalisations. Respondents will also unconsciously or otherwise give the answer they think will impress the questioner or which they think the questioner wants to hear. It may indeed be embarrassing to reveal the whole truth or such information may place the individual in an unfavourable light.

COMMENTS ON THE DATA

It was interesting and surprising to note that many respondents had settled into a wide variety of occupations. Although most of these were still in the construction industry, some respondents had succeeded in crossing occupational boundaries and had taken up jobs which had little relationship to the courses they took at West Biscop.

The data on why individuals chose to retrain was as expected, and more useful data might have been obtained if this question had been left completely open ended. Unfortunately, however, a postal questionnaire does not lend itself readily to that sort of approach. It should be noted that half of the respondents ticked more than one

alternative, so the ticked alternatives may or may not occupy positions of equal importance in the respondent's mind. Interestingly, the influence of rising levels of unemployment over the last 5 years did not show itself in the data. Alternative (e), which refers to changes in personal life is rather vague and general, and would have been better pursued through face to face interview.

The reasons given for choosing West Biscop College were as might be expected. The vast majority of respondents saw the course rather than the college as the major influencing factor in their decision.

Finance was undoubtedly the major problem which these adults faced in embarking upon a course of full-time study. Grants and allowances seemed to be inadequate. The biggest difficulties were encountered by those who had been unable to prepare financially for the subsequent drop in income. Probably those who had been unemployed for some time before commencing the course would suffer the greatest hardship.

When respondents were asked which aspects of their course they had found difficult or easy, it would have been more enlightening also to ask why. Difficulties with subjects like maths, bookkeeping and estimating may well have been due to a poor general basic education. Other subjects like economics may have seemed to students to be irrelevant to the work they were training to do in the construction industry. Such artificial barriers which are consequently erected may block effective learning.

A P P E N D I X
N U M B E R T H R E E
C O M P A N Y S U R V E Y

INTRODUCTION

A brief one and a half page questionnaire was despatched to eight companies, all within the geographical area covered by the research. (See Appendix 6, Items 9 to 11) Five companies completed and returned the questionnaire. The data thus obtained was added to similar information already collected through interview with managers at six other companies. Other data collected from these last six companies was also used as the basis of Part III of this thesis.

The questionnaires were mailed early in August 1987, so the data covered the 12 month period prior to that date and the 12 month period subsequent to that date. The interviews were carried out over a period between August 1986 and July 1987.

The data collected from these eleven companies is summarised below in table form. Companies A to E were contacted by postal questionnaire, and in the remainder of cases data was collected by interview. Table 1 provides details regarding the characteristics of each company. Table 2 shows the amount of training which occurred or was expected to occur in each company and table 3 indicates the number of adult employees who were trained or retrained and the purpose of such training/retraining.

TABLE NO. 1
TYPE AND SIZE OF ORGANISATION

Company	Type of Organisation	Size of Workforce	Main Product or industry
A	Part of multi-national	632	Oil refining
B	Part of larger chemicals/ rubber group	126	Synthetic rubber latex
C	Part of national group of companies	360	Ship repairing/ oil refinery maintenance
D	Part of multi-national	494	Oil refining
E	Part of large electronics group	1442	Electronic semi-conductor components
F	Part of large chemicals group	800	Chemicals
G	Part of large chemicals group	157	Fertiliser
H	Part of multi-national	405	Chemicals
I	Part of larger group	395	Marinetransport hose
J	Part of foreign-owned oil and chemicals group	800	Fertiliser
K	Part of large British-owned group	2250	High Technology Engineering

TABLE 2
TRAINING AND RETRAINING OF ADULT EMPLOYEES

Company	Training/Retraining of Adult Workers		% of turnover* spent on training
	Occurred within last twelve months	Will occur within next twelve months	
A	Yes	Yes	-
B	Yes	Yes	.06%
C	Yes	Yes	-
D	Yes	Yes	1%
E	Yes	Yes	< 1%
F	Yes	Yes	-
G	Yes	Yes	-
H	Yes	Yes	-
I	Yes	Yes	-
J	Yes	Yes	-
K	Yes	Yes	5%

*Includes training and retraining of adults.

TABLE 3
TYPE AND VOLUME OF TRAINING/RETRAINING UNDERTAKEN IN THE LAST
TWELVE MONTHS

Company	Number of Employees			
	VDUs, Computers Robotics	Introduction of New Work Methods	Multi- Skilling	Regular Training Package
A	(650 employees undergoing training/retraining in all areas)			
B	45	45	29	7
C	4	70	100	50
D	90	44	-	32
E	-	-	-	230 (new starters)
F	*	*	*	*
G	-	-	20	*
H	*	-	-	-
I	*	*	-	*
J	*	*	*	-
K	*	-	*	*

* denotes that training has occurred in this area but the exact numbers of employees affected is unknown.

COMMENTS

There was no attempt to select companies with particular product ranges, nor were companies selected on the basis of their size, although the sample did provide examples of medium to large sized establishments within a fairly limited range of product manufacture and processes.

The results showed that all companies had either trained or retrained adults in the twelve months prior, or planned to do so in the year to follow. The figures given are only a rough guide since it was impossible to elicit, in such a brief questionnaire, the exact nature and length of such training. Reference to the percentage of company turnover spent on training adults offers a further guide, although this information was not provided by all of the companies. In one case where turnover percentage was not revealed it was considered to be confidential information. Another respondent misunderstood the question and in other cases the information was not available.

It should be noted that the data does not show whether the same level of training or retraining will occur on a regular basis. A particularly high level of training or retraining may occur when a company is undergoing restructuring, as was the case with at least three of the companies.

As stated earlier the companies were not selected according to any particular criteria, except that they were located within the geographical area of the research. The one characteristic which they shared was that they were all part of a much larger organisation, either British-based or international. The results do not, therefore, cast light on the degree and type of training or retraining which occurs in the smaller locally-based establishments.

Given the small size of the sample, the similarity of characteristics amongst the companies and the limited range of information sought, it is not felt that the data collected is representative of any large group of companies. Therefore, no attempt has been made to generalise from the findings. However, the data was useful in that it showed that training of particular types and in specific volumes is occurring within a

particular location and within a particular type of company. This is exactly the type of company studied in Part III of this thesis. The purpose of this short survey was merely to expand on some of the data already gathered by use of qualitative methodology in a small number of chemical and engineering companies.

A P P E N D I X

N U M B E R F O U R

A S E C O N D S U R V E Y O F P A S T

S T U D E N T S A T W E S T B I S C O P

C O L L E G E

I N T R O D U C T I O N

This is a follow-up study of the students at West Biscop College who were interviewed during 1986 and 1987. The aim of the survey was two-fold. First to discover the job destination of each student and compare final job destinations to the course which each student had taken at West Biscop, to ascertain the degree to which the course had been helpful in enabling them to obtain the employment they desired. An attempt was also made to assess the degree to which respondents had been geographically mobile in pursuit of employment.

Second, the survey was designed to tap retrospective feelings regarding the courses at West Biscop and about the experience of being a full-time mature student in a college of further education. The courses researched were the Building Site Managers' Course, the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, the Small Building Business Course, the Systems Engineering Course and the Wood Trades Course. With the exception of Systems Engineering, all of these courses were in the Department of Building and Civil Engineering.

Questionnaires were despatched to each of the students who were originally interviewed as part of the research at West Biscop. It should be noted that not all of the students on the five course were interviewed at that time. Out of a possible total of 56 students, 48 were interviewed. The questionnaire (see Appendix 6, items 5, 6, 7 and 8) was accompanied by a personally addressed letter referring to the previous interview and thanking each person for their time and help on that occasion. This was followed by a request for their assistance once more. As with the questionnaire detailed in Appendix 1, each respondent was offered the option of receiving a copy of the final report and of having his address passed on to former course colleagues if he wished, as incentives to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire covered 6 pages and was expected to take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. A combination of closed and open-ended questions were used. A stamped addressed envelope was enclosed, and a follow up letter was sent 3 weeks later.

Out of a total of 48 questionnaires despatched, 29 were returned completed. This gave a response rate of 60.4 per cent (see Table 1 below). It should be noted that the totals and comments in this appendix relate only to those students who responded to this final questionnaire. A 100 per cent response rate may have produced a very different result. For example, only two students were without employment at the time of

completing the questionnaire, and these two individuals had already enrolled on training or education courses which were to begin soon. There are a variety of reasons why people do not respond to postal questionnaires, and in this case it is possible that those individuals who were unhappy about their current employment prospects felt reluctant to pursue the issue in a questionnaire. In addition, the lapse of time between completing the course and answering the questionnaire was only five to six weeks for some students, although for others it was over one year.

TABLE 1
RESPONSE RATE LISTED ACCORDING TO COURSE

Course	Responses		Percentage % Response
	Possible	Actual	
Building Site Managers' Course	10	5	50
Estimator/Surveyors' Course	10	8	80
Small Building Business Course	9	4	44
Systems Engineering Course	12	6	50
Wood Trades Course	7	6	86
TOTALS	48	29	(60.4%)

The length of time between finishing the course and completing the questionnaire was one year for the Small Building Business Course and four months for the Building Site Managers' Course. Both these courses had a relatively low response rate. It is assumed that the distance created by the lapse of time resulted in a lower response rate.

EMPLOYMENT

As stated earlier, only two respondents were currently without employment, but both had enrolled on training or education courses which were about to commence. All graduates of the Estimating Course and the Small Building Business Course had secured employment for which their course had prepared them. Only one student from the Building Site Managers' Course had taken a job he was qualified to perform prior to taking the course. Graduates of the Wood Trades Course and Systems Engineering Course fared less well. With regard to the Systems Engineering course one student was working as a process operator with a chemical company and another was working as a bus driver. Of those who had completed the Wood Trades Course only one individual had succeeded in finding employment using his woodworking skills and he had set himself up as a self-employed tradesman. One respondent had taken employment as a farmworker, and another as a warehouseman. A third respondent was working as a chargehand with the Training and Community Programme Division of a local building company, and it is not clear how much he was using the skills he acquired on the course.

The table below lists the jobs which members of the five courses took up upon leaving West Biscop:

TABLE 2
EMPLOYMENT DESTINATIONS

	<u>Estimator/Surveyors' Course</u>	<u>Small Building Business Course</u>
	Maintenance surveyor	self-employed builder
	Quantity surveyor	self-employed builder
	Manager surveyor	self-employed builder
	Estimator/surveyor	self-employed builder
	Assistant estimator surveyor	
	Assistant surveyor (2 respondents)	
	Self-employed builder	
	 <u>Wood Trades Course</u>	 <u>Systems Engineering Course</u>
Chargehand	Self-employed woodworker (working for Community Programme Division of a building company)	Tester/fault finder Chargehand (working for telephone exchange manufacturer)
	Warehouseman	Telephone Engineer
	Farmworker	Chemical Process Operator
	Unemployed (waiting to take up place on government training course)	Bus driver
		Unemployed (waiting to take up place on HND electronics course)
	 <u>Building Site Managers' Course</u>	
	Clerk of works with local authority	
	Site agent	
	Site supervisor	
	Assistant site agent	
	Foreman	

An addendum was attached to each questionnaire to be completed by those who had set up their own business. The addendum was designed specifically for those who had completed the Small Building Business Course, but two other respondents, one from the Estimator/Surveyors' Course and one from the Wood Trades Course were able to complete it. The addendum asked specifically for details regarding their businesses, for example, how many months they had been in business and the number of employees. Of those who had completed the Small Building Business Course, two businesses were twelve months old, one was fourteen months old and one was sixteen

months old. The graduate of the Estimator/Surveyors' course had been in business for ten months and the individual who had completed the Wood Trades course had been operating his woodworking business for one and a half months. The table below shows the number of workers which each business employed categorised according to whether they were directly employed or employed under a sub-contract.

TABLE NO. 3
SMALL BUSINESSES - NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Type of Business	Number of months in Business	Number of Employees: Directly Employed	Sub- Contract
<u>Small Building Business Course</u>			
Building	12	None	4
Building and joinery	12	1*	None
Building contractor	14	None	Varies
General builder	16	1*	Varies
<u>Estimator/Surveyor Course</u>			
Building	10	20	45+
<u>Wood Trades Course</u>			
Wood-working	1 1/2	None	None

* It is not clear whether this figure refers to the proprietor or to one employee in addition to the proprietor.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the course they had completed was essential in enabling them to obtain their present job. As might be expected the respondent who was working as a bus driver answered no. Answers were generally predictable, although there were a few responses which called for explanations. For example, the estimator who was self-employed answered no because he took over the family business. Those who answered yes from the Estimator/Surveyors' Course and the Systems Engineering Course explained that the qualification was needed for the job; that employers required a paper qualification along with practical experience. A more mature student from the Estimator/Surveyors' Course pointed out that the college course was valuable to him because most employers were unwilling to train people over 20 years of age. Of the Building Site Managers, most felt that possessing a diploma made a difference at job interviews and impressed prospective employers. In contrast, one graduate of the course felt that, in his experience employers did not recognise the course. However, he also added that his particular skill, plumbing, provided an inappropriate background for anyone wishing to take up building site management. The following table shows how respondents from all courses answered this question:

TABLE 4
VALUE OF COURSE IN SECURING EMPLOYMENT

Course	Course was necessary	Course was not necessary
Building Site Managers' Course	4	1
Estimator/Surveyors' Course	7	1
Small Building Business Course	2	2
Systems Engineering Course	2	3
Wood Trades Course	1	4
TOTALS:	16	11
	(55.2%)	(37.9%)
(2 missing cases)		

Respondents were also asked if they had undertaken any other employment or training course since completing their course, and whether would like to do so in the future. This gave an indication of their desire to improve their own occupational positions, as well as their general view of the value of education and training after having experienced it themselves. Only two respondents had completed further courses. These were two one-day courses and a six-day course, all were related to current employment. This low level of involvement in further training or education is not surprising given the short lapse of time between finishing the course at West Biscop and completion of the questionnaire.

All respondents, with the exception of two, were interested in taking further education or training courses. Those giving negative answers explained that their current working hours would prevent them from undertaking education or training. The reasons for wishing to pursue further courses were generally concerned with improving career

prospects. In addition, two mentioned the necessity of keeping up with technological advances, and one placed emphasis on the value of self-improvement.

Finally with regard to employment, an attempt was made to determine how mobile respondents had to be to obtain employment. As might be expected respondents were most successful at finding employment in the south of England. Those who took up less skilled work generally did not move far afield. Eight respondents had moved to different addresses in the British Isles and four of these were in the south. One Building Site Manager was working on a contract in Saudi Arabia as a foreman on a construction site.

COMMENTS

Those who found employment for which their course prepared them seem to have done so in the south of England. When interviewing prospective candidates for courses some tutor's stressed that willingness to move around the country to find employment was a prerequisite for selection. Since the success of the course was measured by the number of people who found employment, the priority given to mobility makes sense. One of the graduates from the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, who eventually accepted a job in the south of England, explained that he was offered six jobs before he accepted one which offered further training.

Some respondents took employment for which they were adequately qualified before commencing the course. In one case this seems to have been linked to a lack of success on the course, and the respondent took pains to outline his difficulties with the

course.

With other respondents the real reason is not clear and can only be guessed at. For example one respondent said he took his job "to get from underneath his wife's feet", and another said his diploma was not recognised by employers. With those who completed the Wood Trades course, however, it is clear that the course was not designed to prepare individuals for employment in joinery or carpentry without previous experience in the trade. This may have been the MSC's intention in funding the course, but it appears from comments made during interview, as well as in answering this questionnaire, that the course was too short or inadequately organised for a sufficiently wide range of techniques to be taught.

It may be, of course, that family and other commitments prevented individuals from moving to seek employment. They also may have been prepared to accept any type of job to ensure an income whilst looking for more skilled or better paid employment.

All the Small Building Business Course graduates who responded seemed, to date, to have been successful in their business venture. It is interesting that, of the four individuals who responded three of them readily admitted to experiencing learning difficulties throughout the course, and were probably the least confident. The course tutor for this course had remarked in interview that those people who did well on his course did not necessarily make the best small businessmen in the building trade, and perhaps this statement has been born out.¹

THE COURSE

The results in this section show striking similarities to results from the survey of past students summarised in Appendix one.

Respondents were asked several questions about the content and value of the courses and the results have been computed into positive and adverse comments about the course itself, about particular subject areas and about the quality of teaching. The questionnaire was also designed to elicit information regarding the problems faced by mature students on training courses such as these, and the results are listed below.

In the questionnaire, respondents were first asked if they experienced any learning difficulties during the course, and surprisingly, four said yes, they had problems for the whole of the course. Two of these individuals had been students on the Systems Engineering Course and two were Small Building Business Course graduates. These responses, together with others are given in the table below:

TABLE 5
LEARNING PROBLEMS

Course	The problems persisted for:			No problems at all
	One to two weeks	First ten weeks	Whole course	
Building Site Managers'	2	-	2	1
Estimator/ Surveyors'	4	1	-	3
Small Building Business	2	1	-	1
Systems Engineering	-	4	2	-
Wood Trades	2	-	-	4
TOTALS	10	6	4	9
	(34.5%)	(20.7%)	(13.8%)	(31%)

Some of the problems faced by the students were related to living away from home. West Biscop had a national catchment area, although some of the students on these five courses were local. All six respondents who took the Wood Trades course lived locally. Two of the respondents from the Systems Engineering Course lived locally as did one from the Building Site Managers' Course. In all, nine respondents or (31 per cent) lived locally. Four respondents lived away from home for the whole of the course, ten for week days only and five lived away from home during the college term only.

Respondents were asked to state whether living away from home created any particular problems and they were given a list of possibilities to tick accordingly. Nine individuals said they experienced no problems at all, eight had financial problems, three problems with travelling, and three had problems with domestic arrangements. Students were not

asked to elaborate on these particular options, although two of the younger students said being away from home adversely affected their relationships with their girlfriends. One relationship ended completely. A third respondent said that he missed his girlfriend, and a fourth said he missed his wife and family although he could cope with the separation.

As far as financial sacrifices were concerned, ten respondents said sacrifices they made were large and twelve thought they were small. The group which felt most strongly about the financial sacrifices involved in studying full-time were the Estimator/Surveyors, and it should be noted that some of this group gave up employment to retrain. Next in terms of strength of feeling were those who had completed the Systems Engineering Course, followed by graduates of the Building Site Managers' Course. Only one individual who had taken the Wood Trades Course felt the financial sacrifices were large and no one from the Small Building Business thought they had made large financial sacrifices in embarking upon the course.

Several questions were devoted to eliciting the respondents' opinion about the course they had recently completed. The responses have been divided into adverse and positive comments. The pattern of responses varied according to the course, although there was some similarity across courses. With the exception of graduates from the Building Site Managers' Course, respondents felt that their course had been too short. This was especially true of those who had completed the Wood Trades Course. They believed that their course suffered because of lack of depth and detail in some topic areas, and there was insufficient time for consolidation of learning. Graduates from the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, the Wood Trades Course and the Building Site Managers' Course all felt that too much time was wasted, and better course organisation was required with fewer free periods. Surprisingly few mentioned the training allowance.

Although there was no question specifically dealing with this topic, there was space allowed on the questionnaire form for respondents to mention anything about the course they felt was important. Respondents who had completed the Estimator/Surveyors' Course and the Wood Trades Course did mention that they felt the allowance was too low, and one graduate of the Building Site Managers' course complained about the lack of support and involvement of the Manpower Services Commission.

Across several of the courses there were complaints about specific subject areas and the quality of teaching in these areas. These subjects were, first computers, with complaints from the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, the Systems Engineering Course and the Building Site Managers' Course. Second, respondents from the Estimating and Building Site Managers' Courses were unhappy with levelling and or surveying lessons.

Respondents were not asked to comment specifically on tutors, although some did. The comments were varied. Generally respondents were careful to point out that they had experienced some first class teaching from some committed teachers. However, in contrast, the commitment of certain other teachers was brought into question, especially towards the end of the courses. Respondents complained of some tutors wasting time and spending an unnecessary amount of time out of the classroom whilst the lesson was in progress.

Taking each course in turn, respondents who had completed the Building Site Managers' Course complained principally about the poor organisation of the course and time wasted. They also commented adversely on two subject areas, computing and contract law. One respondent suggested the course could be improved by greater involvement of national building companies in terms of the course content and financial

input. Of those who completed the Estimator/Surveyors' Course, three respondents felt the course was too short, and five passed adverse comments about the quality of teaching in computing. There were also comments about time wasting and the need for a nationally recognised examination at the end of the course. Comments from those who had completed the Small Building Business Course were mainly about the limited length of the course, and one student felt that the course would benefit by some explanation earlier about how the different aspects of the syllabus fitted together to serve the small businessman. In the main, comments from the Systems Engineering Course graduates were about the balance between practical and theoretical subjects. Consistently they felt that a greater practical emphasis was needed and that the level of theoretical work was unnecessarily advanced if the aim of the course was to prepare students for technician level employment. One respondent commented that the theoretical work was necessary only if students were preparing for a higher level qualification. Criticisms from the Wood Trades Course graduates were almost exclusively about the shortness of the course, which meant that more advanced work could not be attempted. They felt that a 10 week course did not adequately prepare them for work in joinery or carpentry. One respondent stated that "If the purpose of MSC courses is to get people back to work, this is a complete waste of money". They also complained that time was wasted and they would have preferred more individual tuition from tutors. One respondent felt the problem could be solved by appointing more tutors to the course, whilst others felt the tutor's time could be better organised.

Despite the adverse comments, and with only one or two exceptions, respondents were grateful for the opportunity to retrain at West Biscop College. They commented that retraining was a wise decision in terms of future prospects, despite the temporary financial hardship. Many said that they enjoyed the course and expressed their thanks to some of the tutors. They felt the course had given them confidence and insights as

well as practical skills, and an opportunity for career advancement which they would not have had otherwise.

COMMENTS

Learning problems appear to have been experienced mostly by those who took the Systems Engineering Course and Building Site Manager's Course. These difficulties seem to have been a reflection of four factors, first the difficulty of the course, second the length of time the individual had been out of education, third the ability of the student, and finally the quality of teaching. Course difficulty appears to have been the major source of problems for the Systems Engineering students. The course was acknowledged by staff to be intensive and demanded a certain level of mathematical ability from the students. Other factors may have been involved. It was probably a combination of the other factors which caused difficulty for students on all of the other courses.

When asked which were the major difficulties they experienced if they had to live away from home, financial problems came top of the list for most respondents. However, the degree to which embarking on full-time training was a drain on an individual's resources varied from individual to individual and probably the way the sacrifice was measured. For example, a few respondents gave up employment to take the course, and at least one other had turned down a job offer immediately before commencing the course. The money not earned in these jobs would represent a sacrifice. The training allowance was barely adequate and, especially for men with families, it had to be supplemented with social security payments. To maintain living standards some had

to draw on savings. Those who had been unemployed for a time before commencing the course, may not have had this resource on which to draw.

By taking account of other comments on the questionnaire, many of the complaints about courses, appeared to be related to particular teaching styles of specific teachers. Students were quick to perceive a lack of commitment on the part of some teaching staff and were unhappy with tutors who taught below, or too far above, their ability range. Unlike younger students these individuals were able to look beyond what went on in the classroom and were able to make comments about the use of classroom time and the organisation of the course. They were making financial sacrifices to study and they wanted value for money.

CONCLUSION

This questionnaire was of value from two points of view. First, it gave some idea of the success of these courses in providing people with the skills and general competencies necessary to secure the type of employment they desired. Second, it offered the opportunity of gaining the student's retrospective views of their experiences as full time students on training courses. Once the concerns of course work and examinations were behind them it was hoped that respondents would be able to offer more balanced comments.

In a sense this questionnaire failed in its purpose because the sample was so small and because only 60 per cent of those originally interviewed responded to the

questionnaire. Those who had responded were relatively successful in finding employment, but this result does not offer any reliable information about the other 40%, since a lack of response may be related to lack of success in the job market.

N O T E S

- ¹ Interview with tutor: 12th September 1986.

A P P E N D I X
N U M B E R F I V E
O T H E R T H E O R I E S O F S K I L L I N G
A N D D E S K I L L I N G

The following is a summary of some other theories of skilling and deskilling which are *not mentioned in Chapter 9*. This Appendix should be read in conjunction with Chapter 9 since the conclusions reached in this chapter pertain to some of the theories outlined below.

THE HUMAN CAPITAL APPROACH

This approach, which is closely allied to Post-Industrialism, suggests that advanced industrial societies require increasingly skilled workforces, for example, Bell (1973), Fuchs (1968), Touraine (1969). Penn regards Post-Industrialism, along with Marxism,

as one of the dominant "grand-theoretical interpretations of skilled work in advanced societies". (Penn, 1985, pp. 36-37)

Touraine suggests a three-phase development of capitalism. The first phase represents a system characterised by craft work and limited product specialisation. Phase two is a transition period of partial automation, where machines are fed by unskilled workers; and the final phase is characterised by complete automation with workers occupying controlling, supervisory or maintenance roles only. (Bell, 1973; Fuchs, 1968; Touraine, 1969)

The overall theme of the work of these authors suggests that, as technology becomes more sophisticated, an equally sophisticated and better educated workforce is needed to develop the technology. A view especially popular in the United States during the 1960s. (Penn and Scattergood, 1985, p. 612; Penn and Wigzell, 1987, p. 6; Penn, 1985, pp 36-37; Penn, 1983(b), pp. 24-25; Davis, Spring, 1988, p. 48)

Lee, however, is critical of this approach since it suggests a simple relationship between the "technical content of skill" and "the manner in which the class structure as a whole will evolve". He states that:

"By assuming that average skill requirements in industry are being progressively upgraded such work attempted to establish as inevitable embourgeoisement or professionalization of the social hierarchy." (Lee, 1981, p. 57)

Penn and Scattergood also state that the Human Capital approach has been challenged by, for example, Frobel et al (Frobel, 1980, quoted in Penn and Scattergood, 1985, p. 612) who points out that the manufacture of high technology products has not necessarily demanded a highly skilled labourforce. Also the work of

Paul Willis (Willis, 1977) and Paul Corrigan (Corrigan, 1979) illustrate that an expansion in formal education does not necessarily lead to a better educated and skilled workforce. (Penn and Scattergood, 1985, p. 612)

THE COMPENSATORY THEORY OF SKILL

The compensatory theory of skill is examined by Penn and others in a series of articles. Penn consistently rejects Braverman's deskilling thesis for its seeming rigidity, which results from its anchorage in Marx's theory of capitalist development. This has as a major feature the progressive proletarianisation of the working class. His argument is based on criticism of Braverman's inadequate treatment of working class organisation and consciousness.

The compensatory theory of skill suggests that:

". . . technical change generates processes of both skilling and deskilling. Secondly, in advanced capitalist societies these effects are international. Thirdly, technological changes tend to deskill direct productive roles but put an increased premium on a range of ancillary skilled tasks that are associated with the installation, maintenance and programming of automated machinery. Fourthly, it is suggested that technological change tends to advantage certain occupational groups and disadvantage others. Finally, this model concludes that technical change is affecting traditional forms of the division of labour and therefore poses both threats and opportunities for organised labour in countries like Britain." (Penn and Wigzell, 1987, p. 7)

Penn's other major criticism of Braverman's is based on his lack of "relevant systematic evidence". He points to research by Jones (1982), Fincham, (1983), Martin (1981) Sword-Isherwood and Senker (1980), and Cockburn (1983) which he states provide no

evidence of a straight forward deskilling tendency in British industry. (Penn and Scattergood, 1985, pp. 613-614)

Penn's conclusions are based on empirical studies of maintenance workers in the north west of England with Wigzell in 1987 and of unskilled workers in the paper and board industry with Hilda Scattergood in 1985. (Penn and Wigzell, 1987; Penn and Scattergood, 1985)

These studies show no overall tendency towards deskilling but rather a complex pattern of occupational change. This is explained in part, by the compensatory theory of skill, developed, according to Penn, by neo-Marxists "to extract themselves from some of the problems inherent in Bravermania particularly its tendency to deductive, ahistorical reasoning". (Penn and Scattergood, 1985, p. 616)

Penn and Scattergood conclude that overall there is little evidence of deskilling in the paper industry, which is a process industry, and they acknowledge a modified version of the compensatory theory of skill.

THE NEO-CLASSICAL MODEL

This model is developed from the work of Adam Smith. It denies that the basic feature of the capitalist mode of production is the confrontational relationship between labour and capital. A transformative role for labour is accepted but competition between capitals is seen as equally if not more important. Because of the shift of emphasis the

need to introduce labour-saving innovations is not so important. These pressures create simultaneous reskilling and deskilling of the workforce. (Littler, 1982, pp. 14-15)

THE ROLE OF LABOUR MARKETS

Finally, there are those writers who prefer to shift attention from "exploitation of the worker at the point of production" to a Weberian emphasis on market relationships. Labour markets are seen as crucial in explaining the class position of workers and the nature of deskilling. (Lee, 1981; Lee, 1982, p. 151)

Lee attempts to explain the interrelationship between the labour process and labour market factors. He suggests it may be more convenient to think of the labour market as "a series of social 'filters' intervening between productive skill and class structure". He refers specifically to "industry shifts", that is the industry mix in an economy; "cyclical shifts" or fluctuations in the level of economic activity and "occupational shifts" which are internal to the workplace and represent for example changes in the use of technology. It is necessary in this context to distinguish between deskilled workers and deskilled jobs.¹ (Lee, 1981, pp. 61-62)

He explains for example that:

". . . a job may be downgraded, . . . but the resulting technical change may so expand product volume that displaced skilled workers are reabsorbed elsewhere, still performing skilled work." (Lee, 1982, p. 151)

So deskilling is dependent upon the availability and accessibility of work as well as the extent to which a particular job is politically accepted as skilled; reference to the social construction of skills. (Lee, 1981, pp. 58-59)

In general terms, and using official employment statistics, Lee suggests that deskilling does sometimes occur, but that changes in the labour process effected as a result of changes in technology do not represent an even, straight forward process. He points out that the consequences will be different in different sectors and in different societies, depending upon the prevailing circumstances. He further states that a loss of jobs or a deskilling of jobs in one industry may be matched by an increase of skilled jobs in another sector. He cites examples where computerization has led to the modification rather than destruction of traditional skill and has shifted:

"... the locus of manual skill requirement from production to planning and maintenance. But a surprising number of craft jobs have simply remained resistant to mechanization because of such factors as the small size and 'marginal' nature of the employing organization and the variability of production. Of course, no one can be sure about what may happen in the future. Also it is possible to point to a number of exceptional cases such as printing where the existence of union based 'social construction' is well-documented." (Lee, 1982, p. 160)

Lee's analysis may be criticised on two major issues the first is that he does not explain the relationship between the labour market and the labour process. (Thompson, P. 1984, p. 81) He gives greater emphasis to external labour market shifts, concentrates on the objective competency aspect of skills and neglects changes in relationships within the workplace.

The only satisfactory conclusion to be drawn from this material is that the perceived level of deskilling evident depends very much of the mode of analysis and appears to vary from sector to sector and from job to job. New technology allows for more than

one way to organise work. Loss of skill for one group of workers does not mean loss of skill for all workers, even within the same enterprise. Thompson and Bannon, for example, in their study of electrical assembly workers state: "By any measurable criteria the vast majority of jobs in the industry have been deskilled." but report in the same paragraph that

" . . . the product cycles in telecommunications manufacture does require the company to give considerable responsibility to a minority of mainly technical workers in the early stages of testing and sorting out production problems. In addition, an even smaller minority involved in actual design work may have their skills enhanced." (Thompson and Bannon, 1985, p. 112)

The problem is to define what aspect of skill is being lost or gained and in which way this represents deskilling. Because what may in fact appear to be an increase in objectively defined skills may subjectively result in loss of autonomy.

N O T E S

¹ See also: Cockburn, Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change, and a later article where she spells out carefully the distinction between skill in the job and skill in the worker:

"There is the skill that resides in the man himself, accumulated over time, each new experience adding something to a total ability. There is the skill demanded by the job - which may or may not match the skill in the worker." (Cockburn, "The Nature of Skill: the Case of the Printers", p133)

APPENDIX
NUMBER SIX

QUESTIONNAIRES AND
CORRESPONDENCE USED

IN COLLECTING DATA

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIALW E S T B I S C O P C O L L E G EDEPARTMENT OF BUILDING AND CIVIL ENGINEERINGSURVEY OF FORMER STUDENTS

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Please do
not write
in this
column

Where boxes are provided, please place a tick
(✓) in the box which most closely
resembles the answer you would wish to
give to the question.

To begin with, would you mind providing us with
some information about the direction which your
career has taken since you completed the course
at by answering
the following questions.

1. Address (if different from that to which we
addressed this questionnaire):

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

2. Details of present employment:
 (Please leave this blank if you are not in
 employment at the moment)

(a) Job title:

.....

0123

(b) Name of employer:

.....

0123

.....

(c) Industry/business:

.....

0123

.....

(d) Approximately how long have you held your
 present post?

.....

01234

3. Please give below details of any other jobs
 you have held since leaving

Job Title	Name of Employer	Industry/ business	Dates
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
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.....

012345

0123

0123

0123

01234

4. (a) Have you followed any other education or training course since completing the course at

YES

☐

NO

☐

012

(b) IF you answered 'YES' to question 4(a), please give details of the following:

Name of course:

.....

Length of course:

Qualification/Certificate awarded:

.....

Date of Award:

01234

(c) IF you answered 'NO' to question 4(a), are you interested in taking further education or training courses?

YES

☐

NO

☐

012

Secondly, we wish to discover what you thought were the strengths and weaknesses of the course you took, and how you feel that course might be improved for the benefit of future students.

5. Did you choose to take the course because:

(a) it was an opportunity to get back into employment? ☐

(b) you saw it as an opportunity to advance in your chosen career? ☐

(c) you felt it would offer the chance to change your career? ☐

(d) it filled in time between jobs? ☐

(e) of changes in your personal life? ☐

(f) Other (please specify)

.....
.....
.....
.....

(Please tick as many boxes as you feel appropriate.)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

6. Did you choose to study at
..... because:

(a) you had heard that the
college had a good
reputation? ☐

(b) the college just
happened to offer the
course in which you
were interested? ☐

(c) the college was within
easy travelling
distance of your home? ☐

(d) you were given the
opportunity thereby of
living away from home
for a short while? ☐

(e) Other (please specify)

.....
.....
.....
.....

(Please tick as many boxes as you feel
appropriate.)

7. Would you have been able to secure your
present employment without having completed the
course at West Biscop College?

YES ☐

NO ☐

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

1 2

8. Were there any aspects of the course work which you found particularly difficult? (Please specify.)

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.....
.....
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1	2	3	4	5
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9. Were there any aspects of the course work which you feel did not stretch you sufficiently? (Please specify.)

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.....

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10. Did the course present any learning problems for you, after being away from formal education for some years?

- (a) Not at all ☐
- (b) For the first week or two ☐
- (c) For about the first ten weeks ☐
- (d) Throughout the whole of the course ☐

0 1 2 3 4 5

11. Was it necessary for you to live away from home in order to attend the course?

- (a) For the whole of the course? ☐
- (b) For week days only? ☐
- (c) For term time only? ☐
- (d) Not at all? ☐

0 1 2 3 4

12. IF you lived away from home, did this present you with:

- (a) financial problems? ☐
- (b) travelling problems? ☐
- (c) problems with domestic arrangements? ☐

0 1 2 3

13. Has being a full-time student involved you in:

- (a) making large financial sacrifices? ☐
- (b) making small financial sacrifices? ☐
- (c) no financial sacrifices at all? ☐

0123

14. To what extent have you kept in touch with course members since finishing the course?

- (a) not at all ☐
- (b) by letter ☐
- (c) Christmas card ☐
- (d) by telephone ☐
- (e) personal visits ☐
- (f) once a year ☐
- (g) three or four times a year ☐
- (h) once a month ☐
- (i) every week ☐

01234

56789

(Tick as many boxes as you feel appropriate.)

15. How would you assess the educational contribution that other students made to the course. Did you feel that:

(a) you learned more from class members than from teaching staff? ☐

(b) the knowledge input of the course members was complementary to that of the teaching staff? ☐

(c) the input of course members was of little educational value? ☐

0 1 2 3

16. Are there any further comments you would like to make that might help us improve the course for future students?

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0 1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The data collected will be tabulated and incorporated into a short report. If you would like to receive a copy of this report, please insert a tick in the box:

☐

12

If you also wish your name and address to be passed on to any of your former colleagues on the course, please indicate below their name(s):

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

01234

SURVEY OF FORMER STUDENTS

ADDENDUM

If you are currently running your own business please ignore question 2, and question 3 if necessary, and give instead the following details:

Company Name:

.....

Company Address:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Type of business:.....

Number of employees:

Number of years you have been in business:

W E S T B I S C O P
C O L L E G E

Ref: QLET1

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Dear

The Building and Civil Engineering Department had hoped for some time to carry out a survey of former students in terms of where they are now working and what their general experience of employment has been since they left the College. However, there were always other jobs to do which seemed more urgent.

Then Pauline Foster, a research student from the University of Warwick, who is currently carrying out research in the Department, offered to organise such a survey for us, and we have agreed to allow her to use some of the data collected for her research project. We also saw this as an opportunity for getting your views, as a former student, on the quality, or otherwise, of the course you took at

From the information you provide, we would hope to implement changes that would improve the course and generally make life easier for future students.

I feel it is important to stress that, although the information you supply will form part of a final report, your identity will not be revealed. Only Pauline Foster and myself will have access to your completed questionnaire, and all the questionnaires will be treated as strictly confidential. You will also notice that your name does not appear on the questionnaire at all. The code number printed towards the upper right hand corner of the front page indicates to us your identity; this way we can maintain anonymity whilst making the best use of the data you provide.

By way of a "carrot" or two I can let you have a copy of the report when Pauline has compiled and analysed her data; and also, should you wish me to pass on your current address to any of your former colleagues with whom you may have lost touch, I will be only too pleased to do this. Space is provided on the final page of the questionnaire where you can indicate whether or not you are interested in either of these two offers.

I would very much appreciate you completing and returning the questionnaire, and a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed for this purpose. Despite its apparent bulk, completion should take up no more than fifteen minutes of your time, and possibly less. Many thanks in advance.

Best wishes,

Ref: QLET3

31st July 1986

Dear

I wrote to you in May of this year enclosing a questionnaire, which I had hoped you would complete and return. However, according to my records I do not seem to have received a reply from you.

I realise that it is difficult to set aside time to complete forms and questionnaires and that this particular questionnaire might have looked, at first sight, quite formidable, but I assure you it should take no more than 10 minutes of your time to complete. The Department is anxious to receive a completed questionnaire from you to ensure that we get a representative sample of students who have completed the course. Therefore, just in case you might have mislaid your first copy of the questionnaire, I am enclosing a further copy and would appreciate it if you could complete and return it within the next week or two.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

W E S T B I S C O P C O L L E G E

DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING, CIVIL ENGINEERING AND SURVEYING
DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING, SCIENCE AND COMPUTING

SURVEY OF FORMER STUDENTS

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Please do
not write
in this
column

Where boxes are provided, please place a tick
(✓) in the box which most closely
resembles the answer you would wish to
give to the question.

To begin with, would you mind providing me with
some information about the direction which your
career has taken since you completed the course
at
the following questions.

1. Address (if different from that to which I
addressed this questionnaire):

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Details of present employment:
 (Please leave this blank if you are not in
 employment at the moment)

(a) Job title:

.....

(b) Name of employer:

.....

.....

(c) Industry/business:

.....

.....

(d) Approximately how long have you held your
 present post?

.....

3. Please give below details of any other jobs
 you have held since leaving

Job Title	Name of Employer	Industry/ business	Dates
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4. (a) Have you followed any other education or training course since completing the course at

YES ☐

NO ☐

(b) IF you answered 'YES' to question 4(a), please give details of the following:

Name of course:

.....

Length of course:

Qualification/Certificate awarded:

.....

Date of Award (if you have not yet completed

the course leave this blank):

.....

Why did you undertake this course of study?

.....

.....

.....

(c) IF you answered 'NO' to question 4(a), are you interested in taking further education or training courses?

YES ☐

NO ☐

(d) Please explain briefly your reasons for answering YES or NO to question 4(c) above:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Secondly, I am interested in what you thought were the strengths and weaknesses of the course you took.

5. (a) Would you have been able to secure your present employment without having completed the course at
.....

YES ☐
NO ☐

(b) If you answered NO to question 5(a) please briefly explain why:

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. Were there any aspects of the course work which you found particularly difficult? (Please specify.)

.....
.....
.....
.....

7. Were there any aspects of the course work which you felt were too easy? (Please specify.)

.....
.....
.....
.....

8. Are there any aspects of the course you would like to have changed?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9. Did the course present any learning problems for you, after being away from formal education for some years?

- (a) Not at all ☐
- (b) For the first week or two ☐
- (c) For about the first ten weeks ☐
- (d) Throughout the whole of the course ☐

10. Was it necessary for you to live away from home in order to attend the course?

- (a) For the whole of the course? ☐
- (b) For week days only? ☐
- (c) For term time only? ☐
- (d) Not at all? ☐

11. IF you lived away from home, did this present you with:

(a) no problems at all ☐

(b) financial problems? ☐

(c) travelling problems? ☐

(d) problems with domestic arrangements? ☐

(e) Any other problems? (please specify)

.....
.....
.....
.....

12. Has being a full-time student involved you in:

(a) making large financial sacrifices? ☐

(b) making small financial sacrifices? ☐

(c) no financial sacrifices at all? ☐

13. To what extent have you kept in touch with course members since finishing the course?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) not at all | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) by letter | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Christmas card | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) by telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) personal visits | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) once a year | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (g) three or four times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (h) once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (i) every week | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(Tick as many boxes as you feel appropriate.)

14. If there are there any further comments you would like to make, please use the space below:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The data collected will be tabulated and incorporated into a short report which will be available in approximately 12 months. If you would like to receive a copy of this report, please insert a tick in the box:

☐

If you also wish your name and address to be passed on to any of your former colleagues on the course, please indicate below their name(s):

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

SURVEY OF FORMER STUDENTS

ADDENDUM

If you are currently running your own business please ignore question 2, and question 3 if necessary, and give instead the following details:

Company Name:

.....

Company Address:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Type of Business:

.....

Number of employees:

Direct:
sub-contract:

Number of months you have been in business:



UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
COVENTRY CV4 7AL

TELEPHONE COVENTRY (0203) 523523

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

In reply please quote:

paf/QLET3

7th August 1987

Dear

This letter is an opportunity for me to thank you formally for your helpfulness and patience in allowing me to interview you whilst you were doing the course at The information that you and the other people on your course provided has proved invaluable, and has helped me to build up a useful picture of adult retraining courses within the college.

Now, I am afraid, I need to ask one more favour of you. If you can possibly find the time, would you mind completing and returning, in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope, the attached questionnaire. I know it looks somewhat formidable, but it should take up no more than 15 minutes of your time. You will notice that some of the questions are similar to those I asked when I interviewed you. This is deliberate since your views may have changed over the period of time since you finished the course.

If you would like to receive a copy of the report incorporating the collated results of this questionnaire survey, you should tick the appropriate box on the last page of the questionnaire. I apologise for the delay in publishing the results but as you may or may not know I will be in the United States from August 1987 until July 1988 engaged in some more research, and I will attend to the data from this questionnaire when I return.

Even though I will be away from these shores for the next 12 months someone at the University will be despatching and collecting together the completed and unopened questionnaires for me; and your early reply would be very much appreciated.

Page 2

Just one more point to make, and that is, your answers will be treated as . confidential. As you will note, your name does not appear on the questionnaire, although the code number on the front page allows me to identify you. No other person has access to the key to those code numbers, and the college will only have access to the final report in which the remarks and comments will not be attributed to individuals.

I look forward to receiving your reply; and on a personal level to hearing how you are getting on.

Regards,

Pauline A. Foster



UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
COVENTRY CV4 7AL

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

TELEPHONE COVENTRY (0203) 523523

In reply please quote:

PAF/QLET3A

7th September, 1987

Dear

I refer to my letter of 7th August and the enclosed questionnaire.

This second letter is intended as a gentle reminder that your completed questionnaire has not yet been received. I know it is difficult to find time to complete such tedious things as questionnaires, but if you could 'fish' it out and return it completed in the stamped addressed envelope provided, I would be very grateful.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Pauline'.

Pauline A. Foster

A D U L T T R A I N I N GSURVEY OF LOCAL INDUSTRY

--	--	--

1. What is your organisation's main activity?

.....

2. Please state the number of employees you have within the following areas:

Process/production/maintenance

Administrative/management/service

3. If your operation at is part of a larger organisation, please describe briefly the size and number of companies/branches* within the larger organisation:

.....

.....

4. Has your company trained adult[†] employees within the last 12 months?

YES/NO*

5. Does your company plan to retrain any adult[†] employee within the next 12 months?

YES/NO*

6. If you answered YES to either question 4 or 5 please state the approximate number of adult[†] employees you trained for the following reasons:

Introduction of new technology,
e.g. VDUs, computerisation,
robotics

.....

Introduction of new working methods

.....

Introduction of multi-skilling

Part of regular training package
e.g. induction courses, plant
familiarisation etc.

7. Approximately what percentage of your
company/branch* turnover is spent on
training adults?†

NOTE

† Please assume adult to mean those individuals between the
ages of 20 and 65.

* Delete as appropriate



UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
COVENTRY CV4 7AL

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

TELEPHONE COVENTRY (0203) 523523

In reply please quote:

Dear

I wrote to you in July of last year enquiring as to the possibility of my visiting your company to discuss adult retraining. As you will note from my previous letter I am currently engaged in a research project at the University of Warwick which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The research examines adult retraining in industrial concerns, further education and agriculture throughout and

Your reply dated 22nd July explained that you were unable to participate in the research, and the reasons given are fully appreciated. However, now that I have completed the fieldwork, I am in the process of analysing the data I have already collected from other organisations in the and area. In order that certain aspects of my data can be more representative of the region as a whole, I would be grateful if you would complete and return the enclosed short questionnaire.

I should point out that the data you provide will be treated with the strictest confidence and reference will not be made to your organisation or individuals who have participated in the research. This stipulation will apply to my thesis and any subsequent publications.

An early reply will be very much appreciated since I am due to leave for the United States towards the end of August. I have been awarded a graduate fellowship to carry out research at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. If your reply is received subsequent to my departure, it will be held unopened at the University until my return.

I thank you in advance for your co-operation, and look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline A. Foster



UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
COVENTRY CV4 7AL

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

TELEPHONE COVENTRY (0203) 523523

In reply please quote:

PAF/QLET5A

7th September 1987

Dear

I refer to my letter of 7th August 1987 in which I requested your co-operation in completing and returning a short questionnaire in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

I realise that completion of such questionnaires can often take up more valuable time than those who set them envisage, but nevertheless, I would be extremely grateful if you could find time to attend to my request within the next week or so. Should the questionnaire have been mislaid, or should it never have reached you, I enclose a further copy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Pauline A. Foster'.

Pauline A. Foster

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.C.C.:	Association of British Chambers of Commerce
A.E.U.:	Amalgamated Engineering Union
A.M.B.:	Area Manpower Board
A.T.S.:	Adult Training Scheme
B./T.E.C.:	Business/Technician Education Council
C.B.I.:	Confederation of British Industry
C.E.L.P.:	College Employer Links Project
E.D.C.:	Economic Development Council
E.E.T.P.U.:	Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union
E.I.T.B.:	Engineering Industry Training Board
E.T.:	Education and Training
E.T.:	Employment Training
F.E.:	Further Education
G.M.B.A.T.U.:	General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Unions
G.C.S.E.:	General Certificate of Secondary Education
H.N.D.:	Higher National Diploma
I.D.S.:	Incomes Data Services
I.T.B.:	Industrial Training Board
I.T.O.:	Industry Training Organisation
L.E.N.S.:	Local Employer Networks

M.S.C.:	Manpower Services Commission
N.A.F.E.:	Non-Advanced Further Education
N.A.T.F.H.E.	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
N.A.T.P.:	New Adult Training Programme
N.E.D.C.:	National Economic Development Council
N.J.T.S.:	New Job Training Scheme
N.T.I.:	New Training Initiative
N.U.T.S.:	New Unified Training Scheme
P.I.C.K.U.P.:	Professional, Industrial and Commercial Updating
T.A.:	Training Agency
T.C.:	Training Commission
T.G.W.U.:	Transport and General Workers' Union
T.E.C.:	Training and Enterprise Council
T.O.P.S.:	Training Opportunities Scheme
T.U.C.:	Trade Union Congress
U.C.A.T.T.:	Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians
V.E.T.:	Vocational Education and Training
Y.O.P.:	Youth Opportunities Programme
Y.T.S.:	Youth Training Scheme

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